

BRENDA YORKE



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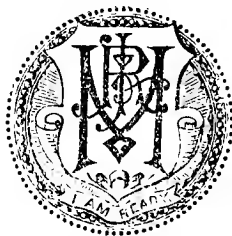
AND OTHER TALES

BY

MARY CECIL HAY,

AUTHOR OF "OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY," "VICTOR AND VANQUISHED,"

"FOR HER DEAR SAKE," ETC., ETC.



LONDON :

JOHN AND ROBERT MAXWELL

MILTON HOUSE, 14 & 15, SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET

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BRENDA YORKE.



CHAPTER I.

"DIM AND PERILOUS."

THE kitchen at Glen Farm was bright and still, with the brightness and stillness which pre-eminently belong to a farm-house kitchen in that hour of the afternoon when the house-work is over, and before the inmates have been summoned from their scattered occupations to their evening meal and rest.

The plates, in rank and file upon the dresser-shelves, had not a speck upon their plain white surface; the vessels and ornaments of brass and tin gleamed like mirrors from the walls; the boards were white as the milk which, in its glistening pail, stood upon the stove to "scald;" and the tall old clock, from which the round moon face looked down with a bacchanalian grin, ticked with that familiar monotony which seems rather to add to, than disturb, a silence.

The stillness of the kitchen at Glen Farm, this August afternoon, had nestled into the heart of its only occupant, and wrapped itself tenderly about the girl sitting there upon the hearth with dreamy eyes, the very picture of thorough idleness.

Her head was raised—a beautiful young head it was,—and her eyes were fixed beyond the open window, far among the clouds which hung above the languid Summer leaves, when a sharp voice broke her dream.

"There you are, Brenda, sitting idle as usual. What are you doing?—at least, what are you pretending to do?"

"I'm really doing nothing, Patience. I'm pretending to help the kettle to boil."

"I don't believe any girl in the country talks such nonsense as you do. Make haste and put the tea-things."

"Don't you think, Patience," inquired Brenda, rising with a smile, "that it wouldn't be much extra trouble for you if you said '*please*' just occasionally, or spoke a little more—what shall I say?—persuasively?"

"I've not time for persuasiveness, and such rubbish. I've my work to do, and I do it, thank goodness."

A cloud passed over the girl's bright, dark face; but then she was taking the cups and saucers from a high cupboard in a corner of the kitchen, so no one read its little story, of humiliation to a young heart pure and proud and over-sensitive.

Patience Kempe, in theory housekeeper at Glen Farm, but in practice mistress (and master too), having assured herself that her orders were likely to be obeyed, marched on into the dairy to "stir" her young servant, as she had just stirred the girl who ought to have been her mistress. And when, with deft fingers, Brenda Yorke had prepared the tea-table, she stood upon the hearth with the tea-pot in her hand, watching the great kettle, whose cheery singing made a fitting accompaniment to her own bright thoughts. So she stood when her father entered the kitchen, bringing Patience in upon his track. "How fortunate!" cried Brenda. "The water boiled the moment your step was heard, father."

And as she filled the tea-pot she sang merrily,

"His very step has music in't
When he comes up——"

But at the end of the line she broke off abruptly, with one swift, longing glance from her father's stern face, out to the garden path, on which the rose-leaves lay undisturbed. A glance which neither of her companions followed or comprehended, and her voice had caught no note of longing or discontent when she substituted other words for those of the old song. "My good Patience, I fancied you would bring the cream in with you, as you come from the very spot where it waits to be fetched"

"It's your place to get the tea; and the dairy isn't so many miles off that a few journeys there should hurt you."

"No; and change of air is good for us all, isn't it, father?" laughed the girl, as she ran past him on her errand.

"She's been idler than ever to-day," remarked Patience, taking her seat before the tea-tray, and looking moodily into Mr. Yorke's hard, weak face.

"Make her work," he said shortly. "What else does she do?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing, Patience?" exclaimed Brenda, entering just then with a bowl of clotted cream. "But really, father," she added, sitting down beside him, "Patience does so much herself, and makes Sarah do so much, that there's hardly anything left for me to do."

"Miss Brenda, you've yerself done most all my work to-day," put in Sarah, who had come in for the pail of milk from the stove. "I'd toothache all morning, sir, and Miss Brenda did every bit

of my work. It isn't fair she should get a scolding when she did it to save me one."

"Where's Andy, father?" Brenda asked, as Miss Kempe's sharp reproof fell upon the maid's devoted head.

"How do I know, child? He hasn't been with me. What use is the lad to me?"

"But, father, poor Andy can do many things. If you would try him you would find it so. And it would so please him to be able to help you—at any rate, to think himself able to help you."

"I can do better without him," answered Mr. Yorke, putting a spoonful of the solid cream upon his apple-tart, and making a gesture to dismiss the subject.

"But, father, he would be safe with you; safe from mischief, from danger, from harm in every way. I cannot always be out with him, and Patience will not let him be about the house with me; and you know, father, there is no one but you and me who cares to watch over Andy."

"I think you do it a great deal too much, Brenda," said Patience, passing her plate before Mr. Yorke for more of the tart which Brenda was eating. "You're always going off somewhere after that troublesome brother of yours."

"I wish I could," replied Brenda, gently, "for I'm always anxious about him when he is not with me. It isn't as if he were like other boys, you know, father."

"I wish he was," ejaculated Mr. Yorke, fretfully.

"Not being so, father, don't you think he needs all the more love and care from us?"

"He gets it from you, at any rate," said Patience, sharply. "You look after him pretty well, I should think; and I'm sure he fares the same as any one else."

"Patience," exclaimed Brenda, the hot blood rushing into her cheeks, "why should my brother fare differently from us?"

"Reason enough, I should think," observed Patience, with her sharp, short laugh.

"He does nothing to help things on, child," said Mr. Yorke, rather heavily. "Being only half-witted as he is, and doing no good to anybody, it's a very good thing for him he is treated so well."

"I should like him treated better," replied Brenda, boldly. "All the more because he is less exacting than any of us; more to be loved, because so very much more to be pitied. Father, when will you listen to this one request of mine?"

"There, let it rest to-night, for pity's sake," he said, glancing quickly across at his housekeeper. "The boy's treated well enough, and it's very tiresome for me to have him with me; so don't worry for ever about that. Now take that letter of mine to the post. Make haste off."

"You wish *me* to take it, father?" asked Brenda, quietly rising to put Andy's tea to the fire.

"Certainly, child. Who else?"

Brenda gave Patience the things she needed for washing the tea-things, then, with the letter in her hand, walked down the garden, unconsciously slackening her step then, and sauntering through the meadows. At each gate she stopped and called "Andy, Andy!" But it was not until she reached the third that a whistle answered her, and a slight, pale boy of fourteen forced his way through the hedge, and danced up to her at the gate.

"I've got him," he whispered; "I've got him—the littlest one you ever saw." And opening his hand he disclosed a small grasshopper, which lay there crushed and dead.

"Oh! Andy," cried Brenda, really hurt, "why did you kill it?"

"Kill it!" exclaimed the boy, bending his restless eyes upon the insect, while the tears started. "Is it dead?—dead? Oh! I don't like killing things! It's wicked to kill things, isn't it, Sis?"

"This wasn't wicked, dear, because you didn't know you did it. Why didn't you leave it in the grass where it was so happy?"

"Because it was so pretty. I wanted it for you."

"You might have brought me a flower instead," she said, gently.

"But, Andy, don't cry, dear, you have done no harm. What made you so late, and—out upon this path?"

"I've been to Glen Court," whispered the boy, putting his mouth to her ear.

She started back a little, the colour mounting to her face.

"Why there?"

"I'll tell you, Sis," replied the boy, with his slow, indistinct utterance. "This afternoon, while you were helping father to spell his letter, I looked, and my seeds hadn't come up one bit—not even yet, so I dug 'em up to see why they didn't grow, and there was nothing the matter with 'em at all—there never is whenever I look, yet they never come up. And then Sir Wilfred came past the gate, and asked me what I was doing, and I told him, and he said they'd never come up—he did say it, though he'd never looked at 'em; and he said he'd lots at home, and I must go with him, and he'd give me some, so I went."

"To the house, Andy?"

"Yes, into a big, big room. Oh! Sis, it was up as high as the blue up there, and all over gold."

"Did you see the pictures?" asked Brenda, almost in a whisper.

"Yes, yes—oh! thousands of hundreds."

"There's one picture I do so remember," said Brenda, looking away from her brother, to where the grey towers of Glen Court stood among the trees. "The picture of a girl with bare feet, leaning back against a hedge bank—this way; with her hands

clasped and hanging down—this way, and full of wild roses. And she is so pretty."

"Oh! there were lots of pretty ones," assented Andy, indifferently. "Why is that the best?"

"Because that's true—quite true," returned Brenda, more as if she were speaking to herself than to her brother. "Once upon a time, there was a Sir Wilfred Glenhore—just as this one is—and he was riding along one day, and saw that very girl in that very attitude. That was the hedge—look, Andy, that one bordering the road above the bridge; and he—he fell in love with her in a moment, and——"

"Yes, go on. Are you sleepy?" inquired Andy, nudging her gently with his elbow, as she gazed dreamily before her.

"And married her; and she was only a farmer's daughter—a very, very small farmer's daughter, Andy."

"Why was she so very small?" inquired Andy, anxiously. "Wouldn't she grow?"

"I mean that her father wasn't even like ours, but was poorer and rougher. Yet she made a beautiful lady, Andy. And they were very happy; and he couldn't have been ashamed of his marriage, else he would not have had her painted in her old dress and attitude. And do you know, Andy, that her son was the bravest and greatest Glenhore that ever lived—I mean up to now?"

"Greater than Sir Wilfred?" asked Andy, a little disappointment in his voice.

"Greater than Sir Wilfred is now," Brenda answered. "He may be greater and braver some day—I don't know. But at any rate, Andy dear, her son was very brave and very noble; quite worthy to be the son of a Glenhore."

"Oh!" said Andy, a little bewildered, "I'll go to tea now, and then I'll set my seeds."

The boy raised his face for a kiss, then ran, leaping and whistling, back to the farm, while Brenda sauntered on towards the little cottage where the letters were left for the postman. When she turned to open the last gate, she came suddenly upon a gentleman, who had been leaning upon it—a gentleman who started from his lounging posture and raised his hat with quick courtesy, as her light, slow footsteps reached him, and who opened the gate for her eagerly, while a smile of untold gladness lighted up the face which had been so still and watchful.

"Brenda, I had begun to fear you were never coming," he said, as he gently closed the gate behind her. "What a wasted evening I should have felt it then!"

"Does this prevent its being wasted, Sir Wilfred?" asked Brenda, leaning back against the gate, and looking back half shyly, half laughingly, into his face.

"Yes, entirely. I had begun to call your father all kinds of unbecoming names, for having sent that letter of his by other hands."

"You knew he wrote it, then?"

"Yes. Andy told me you were spelling his letter, and I guessed you would bring it to the post; so I came and waited here, to win a sight of my beauty."

A puzzled look drew down Brenda's forehead for a moment, and her reply was eager.

"I didn't know I was to come, until tea-time. I wish I had not come at all."

"Hush, my sweet; you do not mean it, though you say it; you cannot mean it. Why, Brenda, if I had it in my power to give such intense happiness to any one as you give to me, only by letting me see you for a moment, I never could find it in my heart to withhold it, as you sometimes do. When will it be the same happiness for you, my darling?"

"No two people's happiness is ever quite the same," said Brenda, the nonchalant tone a little forced, and the smile a little wistful.

"It always is, dear," said Sir Wilfred, watching intently every change in her face, "when the two people's one great hope is the same."

As he spoke, Brenda's eyes wandered down to the grey towers among the trees, and then came back, with a bright light in them, to Sir Wilfred's handsome, questioning face.

"I think," she said, "it is best not to have any great hope at all. I do, indeed, Sir Wilfred."

"I don't," he laughed. "I would not, for anything in the world besides, be without the great hope that is only satisfied when I am near you, Brenda. I cannot conceive now how I bore the Glen without you. I cannot believe it is only a few months since you came to Glen Farm. I utterly and entirely forget the people who lived there before you."

"Your tenants, Sir Wilfred!" said Brenda, quietly. "You must have cared for them very generously and considerably indeed."

"Upon my honour, Brenda, I never thought anything about them. You must scold me as you will—as you generally do, sweet—but it is true. I have never been used to think of my tenants, or to act for them; on the contrary, I'm given to expecting them to act for me."

"I see, Sir Wilfred."

"Do you know that even your implied rebukes are delicious to me, Brenda?" he said, laughing heartily.

"Perhaps the vexation of your tenants is always delicious to you, Sir Wilfred?"

"Stop! stop!" he said, his face clouding quickly. "You misunderstand me, my darling. I like you to reprove me because—I suppose because I like anything which makes you talk of me; but your *vezation* is another thing. I do not know what I would not change, or even forfeit, to guard you from that. But really I don't think people like being interfered with."

"But," replied Brenda, slowly, "care and sympathy are hardly interference."

"Do you know, my pretty little mentor," said Sir Wilfred, leaning sideways with his elbow on the gate, and looking intently at her, "that, in these exquisite moments of stolen intercourse between us, I always feel something sadly wanting in myself. I never feel it with any one else. How can it be?"

"What can it be?" she questioned, brightly. "I should think, if you feel its absence, Sir Wilfred, you must know what it is you miss."

"We Glenhores," said the young Baronet, speaking rather gravely, though his eyes, still fixed upon Brenda's face, were smiling in their depths, "have been a proud and rather solitary family for all the years that we are supposed to have held sway (and we are rather given to enjoy the reflection that there never was a time when we did *not* hold sway), and the very atmosphere of the home in which I have been brought up has been, all my life, feeding me with ideas different from—from yours. We are not guardians, friends, and helpers of our people, Brenda; we are simply English aristocrats, who did not come over with the Conqueror, but who lived over here at the time, and were conquered. And we feel (to my shame I say it, though) that we are a race so far exalted that our interests and feelings cannot be in common with—those of our labourers. You must have heard what a select old lady Miss Glenhore is—the aunt who is staying with me now,—and she is but an exaggerated type of all the race. I shall be just like her when I've lived another five-and-twenty years. I've been educated in the Glenhore style, Brenda, and imbibed their notions, and you will have hard work to wean me from them. It will, indeed, be impossible, my sweet," added Sir Wilfred, delighted as he watched the blush which his last words had brought to Brenda's cheeks, "until I fill my home with a counteracting element. What is it?—why do you start?"

"I must go. The letter will be late."

"Not for half an hour yet," replied Sir Wilfred, looking at his watch. "How can you bear to shorten these few sweet minutes that you give me, Brenda? I have a hundred things to say yet. How is Patience?—Impatience, as usual?"

"Yes—with Andy."

"Poor Andy!" returned the young Baronet, gently, delighted to call up the depths of tenderness into the beautiful eyes of

Andy's sister. "I wonder how your father can keep Patience, when she is so cruel to the boy."

"Father is fond of Patience," said Brenda, slowly, as if she, too, wondered.

"Did Andy tell you he had been vexed and offended to-day, dear?"

"No. Has he?" asked Brenda, quickly.

"I fear so. My aunt, with the French lady who lives at Blarney—Miss Power's ex-governess, who is a great colleague of my aunt's—met Andy as he came to the Court, and I suppose they laughed at his gambols, or his talk, or something; for when he joined me again he had such utter distress on his face as I never saw on any boy's face before. I would not for worlds, Brenda darling, have had it occur through my friends, if I could have foreseen it."

"I think he had forgotten it when I met him. I think he very easily forgets."

"He has never yet, perhaps, had any wrong to remember," returned Sir Wilfred; "I fancy he *would* remember it. Poor lad!—poor lad! I spoke of it both to Mademoiselle Gartret and to my aunt Clarissa."

"Clarissa?" echoed Brenda, glad to change the subject. "What an odd name!"

"My esteemed aunt," said Sir Wilfred, laughing, "was named after a beautiful saint called Clarissa Harlowe, about whom a great book has been written, and she was intended to be just such a paragon. Nature objected to the plan, and so Clarissa Glenhore is—just what she is. I hope you feel the force of that description?"

"Do you not love her?" asked Brenda, wondering over his tone.

"Not at all," was the prompt and honest reply: "nor does she love me, except in my capacity of reigning baronet; nor does she love you, my beauty."

"Me? Of course she does not love me. Why should she?"

"For the very reason that she does not, dear—because I do. Brenda, Brenda, don't look hurt, darling. I must tell you of it, and over and over again, as you so rarely are near enough to be told. How can I help loving you? And why forbid me to tell you so, when you know how true it is, and when you love me too? Surely you do a little, my sweet, though you will never tell me so?"

"Sir Wilfred," said Brenda, laying a soft little hand upon the rail of the gate, "do not tell me this so often. I am so young and so very ignorant, that—that your words make me vain and self-important."

Sir Wilfred's laugh went flying over the fields.

"You vain and self-important ! If any *man* had said it he would have been upon the grass here at my feet before the words were uttered. Is that why you so rarely meet me, then ?"

"No, not entirely."

"Or is it," he continued, gaily, "because you think it good for me to be disappointed sometimes in my dearest wishes ? Never mind looking away, love ; I will not say one word against your treatment of me, so long as I feel so happily and thankfully sure of your love. These few minutes have repaid me for a week of waiting, and would have done so even if we could not have exchanged one word ; for, dear, your eyes brighten so at my coming that you cannot hide their joy, and *they* own when we part, though your lips will not, that we have been happy together. Give me an extra pleasure to-night—own it with just one word."

"I must go," she said softly.

"Darling, your vanity and self-importance are most winning," he answered, her two hands tight in his, his head bending until his glad eyes looked into hers. "Never mind—I read a 'yes' in your eyes, and I shall hear its echo all through this evening, let Gertie and Mademoiselle say or sing what they will to me."

"Are you going to Blarney, then ?" asked Brenda, just for the sake of something to say, as she drew her hands away, and tried to hide her blushing face. "I saw Miss Power in church last Sunday for the first time ; she has been away ever since we came. How pretty she is, Sir Wilfred !"

"Gertie pretty !—is she ? I don't think her prettiness ever struck me. There is only one beautiful face for me in all Somersetshire—only one, Brenda. Love, I wish there were no such things as partings in this world."

"I should not like that," she answered, simply ; "there would be no meetings."

"But I want to be always with you. I am jealous of your leaving me ; I am jealous of any one who sees you more than I do. Has Malcolm Vaughan been troubling you lately ?"

"Malcolm never troubles me."

"He tells you he has a snug and profitable farm at Highfield ?" Sir Wilfred asked, with a smile half satirical and half amused.

"And so he has, Sir Wilfred," she answered, with a quaint little show of haughtiness which pleased him excessively.

"And thirty or forty milking cows ?"

"Thirty-seven exactly."

"And he says you milk famously ?"

"I *do* milk famously, Sir Wilfred."

"And he knows it, and he knows it without one word from me," hummed Sir Wilfred, his eyes full of laughter ; "and does he know you sing Abt's songs the while ; and does he know—who taught them to you, Brenda ?"

"I dare say he does, Sir Wilfred," she answered, with quiet sauciness; "he knows a great many things."

"But it was not he who loitered past you last night, and heard you—how the words rang in my head all through a sleepless night!—

"'I fondly love, yet when thou'rt near
My lips may not impart—'"

"Sir Wilfred," interrupted Brenda, quickly, "where were you last night when I was—milking?"

The delicate colour in the girl's cheeks always deepened a little as she spoke of her home employments to Sir Wilfred.

"Where I would always be, dear—very near you. Mistress Patience still puts you to milk sometimes, then?"

"You were 'loitering past,' I suppose," she said, ignoring the latter part of his speech, "as you spoke of Mac doing."

"I wish you would never speak of Vaughan as *Mac*, Brenda," began Sir Wilfred, in a hurt tone, "I have asked you so often. You must learn to hold yourself very much above Malcolm Vaughan."

"You do a good deal of loitering, Sir Wilfred, don't you?" she continued, in her pretty, earnest voice, again ignoring his speech, as she often did; perhaps, by so doing, amusing and attracting him all the more, because he was accustomed to have his words attended and assented to.

"I am obliged to do so, dear," he answered, lightly; "what else have I to do?"

"Nothing, of course—being Sir Wilfred Glenhore of Glen Court."

"Brenda, why are you laughing? Your eyes are literally dancing with fun, or irony, or—something."

"Shall I tell you what I was thinking, Sir Wilfred?"

"Yes, love."

"That Patience was right when she says I am selfish, and that Mac is right when he says you are indolent."

"If I am as little indolent as you are selfish, my—"

"Oh, hush!" she cried, stopping her ears. "Of course I am selfish; every time Patience says it, I know it is true; and yet"—thoughtfully—"I try not to be."

"You cannot try not to be selfish, dear, because you never were selfish," said Sir Wilfred, gently; "so I expect Vaughan only made a second mistake, and I am not indolent either."

"But you are indeed, Sir Wilfred," Brenda answered, her eyes very serious. "You always say you have nothing to do; and you are always wishing things instead of doing them. Sometimes you wish half a dozen things just while you are loitering about for an hour: yet perhaps in a whole day you don't—you don't—"

The bright colour rose again in Brenda's cheeks, and the child-like eyes grew frightened while Sir Wilfred smiled down into them.

"I don't what, you severe little beauty?"

"You don't *do* half a dozen things," replied Brenda, almost in a whisper.

"But there is nothing to do, sweet."

"You always say that, and it only shows that you cannot yet do even the first thing of all."

"What? See the right I ought to pursue, you mean? Tell me what to do, dear little teacher, and you shall see how energetically I will do it."

"I would rather you did it because—because you see it yourself, Sir Wilfred," she answered, shyly.

He paused a little; then his voice was rather grave.

"Brenda, look me in the face, my love, and answer me from your own heart, not from Vaughan's lips. Am I really indolent?"

"Yes," she answered, simply, her face raised fully and frankly to his.

"Then I, too, will 'try not to be.'"

Very seriously, very tenderly, he said it; and as their eyes met, he fancied—as he sometimes did in rare sweet moments—that this first pure love of hers was part of her very life.

They went back through the gate together, quite silent in their happiness. They had not spoken even when they reached the little cottage which was the end of Brenda's walk. Then she stopped with a start.

"Sir Wilfred, I thought you were going to dine at Blarney?"

"Yes, dear."

"Then please go. You will be so late, Mrs. Power will be astonished."

"Yes, dear; and so will Gertie, and so will Mademoiselle, and so will the venerable relative; and their astonishment will be a boon to me to-night, and vary the usual monotony. Tell Mr. Yorke I am coming to see him to-morrow. He is very fond of me, isn't he?"

"He thinks there is no one in the world like you, Sir Wilfred."

"I wish it were his daughter's thought instead," replied the baronet, standing almost pleadingly before her. "I have no wish beyond this; and often, Brenda, I feel that it is so. To-night I fancy it, my darling, and it makes me go away happy—and yet it makes me linger. Good night; good night, my dearest."

Yet still he held her hand and gazed down into her face, until at last she gently turned away, and walked from him, never looking back.

CHAPTER II.

"LOVE'S HEAVY BURDEN."

SUPPER was laid upon the great kitchen table when Brenda reached the farm again; and beside her father there sat a young man of two or three and thirty, with a slight figure, and a thoughtful, kind face. He was listening while Mr. Yorke talked, in a low, monotonous tone, of what he had sent to the fair the day before; and as he listened—seeming also to listen for another sound beyond—he left untasted the cold meat on his plate. At a glance Brenda took in the whole room; Patience ironing her muslin cap at the farther end, her place vacant at the table; Andy's seat empty, and the two men talking of their stock. Unconsciously the girl's heart sank, and her answer was a little forced when Malcolm Vaughan, who had started up at sight of her, spoke of her tired look.

"Do I look tired, Mac?" she asked, laying her fingers in his brown sinewy hand. "Oh! no, I am not tired. I have no excuse for being tired, for I've only been to post a letter."

She tried to eat and to talk, because she felt his eyes watching her curiously, and because she saw the sharp glance Patience threw across at her, as she too now sat down to supper.

"Where's Andy, Patience?" she asked at last.

"Gone to bed."

"Was he not well?"

"Not well? He was as well as ever I saw him; he ate tea enough for four, and then went straight to bed, because you were out, he said. So your wanderings do harm to others besides yourself, you see."

"It does Andy no harm to go to bed," put in Malcolm, quietly.

"I happen to think it does," retorted Patience. "He's lazy enough all day, without cutting the day short. And this sort of thing does Brenda harm too."

"How, Patience?" asked the girl, quietly.

"How? You must be innocent to ask that. But certainly if your own father makes no objection, it isn't for me to do it," snapped Patience, stooping over her plate.

"No."

Brenda's tone was tired more than angry, and Malcolm turned towards her.

"Dear Brenda, when are you and Andy coming once more up to Highfield?"

"Some day, Mac."

"Will you come to-morrow? And we will have tea in the garden."

"Oh! yes," began Brenda at once; but her father interrupted her.
 "Not to-morrow, child. Sir Wilfred Glenhore is coming to look at the bay colt, and I must have you at home."

The hot blood rushed into Brenda's cheeks. Her blush was so painful in its shamed intensity, that Malcolm, seeing how her father's outspoken intent had hurt her, spoke again gently,

"Then will you come the next day? I will bring the pony to meet you-- slowly, because I know how you enjoy a walk."

"We should like it very much," said Brenda; but still the enjoyment of the plan had all faded now.

"You can go and welcome then, child," said her father, rising; "but I must have you at home to-morrow. Now, Vaughan, I am going for a look round. Will you come?"

"Presently," said Malcolm, rising too, but not following him.

"Brenda," he said, in a natural, pleasant tone, which sat well upon him, though it was not easy to him to speak so, to her whom he loved with such an anxious, unexacting love. "Andy told me you would show me where those wonderful seeds of his were sown."

She went out with him, and led him round to the shady spot of the garden where Andy's flowers refused to grow.

"Here," she said pointing down, but looking away herself, out into the deepening blue of the evening sky.

"Brenda" as he spoke he did not glance down lower than her face, and he laid one hand gently upon her shoulder--"if I speak a word or two to you in the silence here, you will not take it ill, dear heart?"

"No," she answered, wonderingly. "What is it, Mac?"

"Your own true heart is a sure monitor, Brenda, and your simple answer will satisfy me. Are you wise and right in meeting Sir Wilfred Glenhore as you did to-night, and in listening to his impassioned words of love?"

If he had spoken less openly and less earnestly, she would, perhaps, have shaken off his hand; as it was, her eyes met his with a simple, glad surprise, which both pained and pleased him, in his forbearing and unselfish love.

"I never meet him purposely, Mac. When he meets me and tells me that he loves me, I am afraid I like to hear it."

"Brenda, don't be hurt and angry with me, dear. Is Sir Wilfred Glenhore an upright and honourable gentleman?"

Her face was beautiful beyond all words as she raised it in a surprised, shy pride; dropping into the simple speech of the country as she answered

"Would you doubt the Squire's uprightness and honour, Mac? I never, never would! And don't we both live on his land, and isn't he kind to us both?"

Malcolm smiled a little, and took his hand from her shoulder.

"I'm afraid," he said sadly, "that he makes you feel tired of us all. Oh! Brenda, never let that be, dear, for it is bad for yourself as well as for us."

She laughed, a little light, unanxious laugh.

"Oh, no, Mac—no, indeed. I do not tire of you. Why should my heart be changed? Why should I tire? It is just as likely that you should tire of me."

"Which I could never do, however long my life might be spared," said Malcolm, very seriously. "I have loved you since I saw you first, and I must love you to the end."

"Oh, Mac, please don't tell me again," she cried, both hands and voice appealing to him, "because—you know—you know—it is no use."

"I fear I do," he answered, almost solemnly, "but I cannot uproot my love, and so I shall go on hoping. Perhaps some day the little head I love may rest upon my heart, and find ease and repose even there. Good night, dear heart."

After Malcolm had left, Brenda went up to Andy's room, and sitting upon the bed beside the boy, read to him, while he lay listening with wide-open eyes. Then, with his hand in hers, she talked to him of the Story—ever new and ever beautiful—which she had been reading, until they both grew very quiet over it; and she kissed him and went to her room.

She drew down her blind, and set the candle upon her table. Then she took from one of her drawers a little morocco case which lay there folded in paper, and opening it looked long at a beautiful jewel it contained. Very slowly she took the ring from the white velvet and put it on her finger; then with a timid, half-frightened glance, she raised her hand and laid that finger upon her lips.

When she had put out the light she raised the blind again; she stood at the window for long minutes, her eyes wandering in the darkness to where she knew the stone towers rose among the oaks and elms of centuries.

"Brenda! Brenda! say good night again."

The girl crept to the door, feeling her way, the dreaming all forgotten, and her whole heart speaking in the few words she whispered back to Andy; and then, with his kiss upon her lips, she fell asleep.

CHAPTER III.

"THE GUINEA'S STAMP."

THERE were to be apple-pasties for dinner at Glen Farm—that was evident. Brenda stood before the pastry-board, paring the fruit, a large apron tied over her dress, and her round arms bare to the elbow.

"I can't think how you manage to get so much flour about ye when ye're baking," remarked Patience, coming in to baste the joint at the fire.

"It does not require much management, Patience; it comes of itself. Is it on my face to-day?"

"It's everywhere; it always is."

"Isn't flour supposed to be rather good for the complexion?" inquired Brenda, rolling out her pastry. "I won't remove it." And she began to sing, with rare, sweet truthfulness.

"Oh! Patience" (the song broke off suddenly in the middle of a bar), "I ate so many apples while I peeled them, that I really haven't enough. Shall I have time to run to the orchard?"

"I never saw any one so childish as you are, to be eighteen," remarked Patience, sharply. "Stay where you are. I'll bring a few I put away; but they're not for you to eat, remember."

Brenda, filling one of the pasties, went on with her song until, hearing a strange step behind her, she turned, with the rolling-pin in her hand, and the flour not only on her hands, but lying lightly on her hair.

"Oh! Sir Wilfred, I beg your pardon."

"For what? For charming me with that exquisite song?" he said, offering his hand.

"No, I cannot," laughed Brenda. "And please don't come nearer; you will spoil your scarlet if you do."

"Give me your hand, Brenda, or I must take it with that weapon in it. Is it a shillelagh?"

"It's—it's what I require for making pastry," she said, turning to her work again with the sudden shyness which so often seized her in his presence, in the very midst of her nonchalance. "Are you going to hunt without the hounds, Sir Wilfred?"

"They are to try the covers behind Highfield; and all the Glen, and all Forde will be out to see. Why are you not there?"

"I think it is for me to ask such a question, Sir Wilfred," she answered, blushing a little as she felt how impossible it would be to tell him her reasons. "Why is the master of the hounds not there?"

"I am going presently. They don't profess to meet till half-past eleven, and I shall be there by twelve."

"Which is your way of calculating time for an engagement, Sir Wilfred," smiled Brenda. "Even time and tide wait for you, I suppose?"

"You shall see, dear, some day, when we are travelling together." And then he laughed, because her colour rose in such a joyous flood; but, if either had known what that travelling was to be, there would have been silence between them.

Her head was very low now over the table, against which he

was leaning, regardless of all disfigurement of the scarlet hunting-coat.

"Brenda, I really was astonished when I found myself at your gate, instead of the Highfield cover. My will had been stronger to lead me than my intentions. I haunt this place sadly, don't I, love?"

"Yes."

She said it almost carelessly, going on busily with her work. He, watching intently every movement of the nimble fingers, thought nothing of the white rim deepening on his coat.

"What is the mystery you are concocting, sweet?" he asked, slowly raising his eyes from her hands to her face. "Has it anything to do with Solomon's panacea?"

"What do you mean, Sir Wilfred?"

"That I require, above all things, to be comforted with apples, for the reason he held valid."

He could not tell whether she understood him, for just then Patience re-entered the kitchen.

"Patience," he began, with comic gravity, "has Miss Yorke shaken sufficient flour over me yet?"

"Your coat is spoiled, sir," returned Patience, readily; "it's all over flour. Brush Sir Wilfred's coat, Brenda."

But the girl went on with her work, while Patience left the room with the idea that her command would be obeyed. Neither spoke while she was away, and on her return she began to scold Brenda.

"Brush Sir Wilfred's coat," she reiterated; "it's your fault that it's in such a mess."

"I would sooner go to the hunt as I am than that Miss Yorke should be told to brush my coat," Sir Wilfred said, his voice calmly authoritative, his whole expression changed. "I thought it was a joke at first, Brenda, or I should not have given Patience an opportunity of repeating it. Please to lend me a brush," he added, turning to the housekeeper.

"Brenda's willing enough to stop in her work sometimes, if not now," snapped Patience, before she went. "She hasn't done much else but stop all the morning. You can't expect her to do much else when she carries a story-book in her pocket."

"What book is that, Brenda?" asked Sir Wilfred, laughing, when they were alone again.

"'Clarissa Harlowe,'" she said, simply.

"'Clarissa Harlowe'!" He repeated the name with a searching look into her face, as he leaned back in his old place. "Why that book?"

"Because," she began, returning his look with surprise—"because you spoke of it once when we were talking of Miss Glenhore, and I didn't know it; yesterday I found it, and I thought I should like to know it—as you did."

"How much have you read?" he asked, too much in earnest even to be pleased at her last few words.

"I am on page thirteen."

He held his hand towards her, his voice serious.

"Give me the book, please, Brenda."

She looked surprised, but drew it from her pocket, and handed it to him unquestioningly. He took it with a look of relief.

"Thank you, dear. I will send you one instead, better for you and more pleasant."

Patience, on her way back with the brush, stopped involuntarily in the doorway, wondering at the silence, and looking at the picture before her. First at Sir Wilfred, in his easy attitude and brilliant dress, then at Brenda, busily at work, in her calico gown and white apron. And she saw that upon both faces there was an inexpressible beauty which, one day, when the lives of all were changed, even she was to understand.

"May I brush your coat, sir?" she asked, almost gently. "You will be late for the meet."

"Never mind, if I am in at the death," he laughed, turning to her with pleasant thanks.

He had left his hunter with his groom, who slowly exercised the two horses before the garden-gate. When he went out, Brenda followed, for she had seen Andy attempting to take the bridle.

"He is all right, Brenda," he said quietly, remembering her intense love for the boy. "I will manage it."

He brought up the restive horse, Andy following with a shout and dance.

"Take her more quietly next time," he said, pleasantly, patting Andy on the shoulder.

Brenda glanced at him, grateful for his kindness to her brother, and he spoke, in answer to the look.

"He is an obedient little fellow, Brenda, and listens to advice. I call him wiser than many a man who is 'ower worldly wise.' What do you think of that logic of mine? Ride on, Wood. Darling, when shall I see you again?" he whispered, eagerly.

"Here come father and—Mr. Vaughan," said Brenda, turning towards the farm gate.

Sir Wilfred muttered a few impatient words, and began to mount; but suddenly he changed his mind, and taking his hand from the saddle, stood while they came up. Mr. Yorke obsequiously accosted him, while Malcolm Vaughan stood by, merely answering his salute with quiet, indifferent respect.

Brenda watched these two as they stood side by side—Malcolm in his rough, every-day clothes, slight and weather-hardened: Sir Wilfred in his hunting dress of dazzling scarlet and spotless white, noble and high-bred, despite that easy indolence which

seemed habitual to him. She contrasted Malcolm's simple bearing with Sir Wilfred's grand, resistless manners, thinking the two men seemed very apart from each other, yet both very near to her; and she wondered whether, one day, she should stand beside the one, far apart from the other; or whether, rather, one day she should draw them a little nearer. And as she wondered thus—hearing none of Andy's whispered remarks—the baronet mounted his impatient hunter, and rode away, raising his hat to her as he would have done to a duchess.

"I wonder where he intends to join the hounds," remarked Mr. Yorke, with a chuckle. "Brenda, you are to blame for the master's absence from the meet. He is coming to look over the place, Vaughan, and allow me what improvements are required. He's a fine fellow—a very fine fellow, and would do anything for me or mine; as fine a landlord as man need have."

"As one man need have—yes," answered Malcolm, quietly.

"Sis, I am to go to Glen Court at dusk," whispered Andy, delightedly, as they turned into the garden. And Brenda smiled, and thought how great was Sir Wilfred's kindness to her little brother, and so how natural it was that she should love him with all her heart and strength—as she did.

CHAPTER IV

"STUNG TO MADNESS."

THAT afternoon, Mr. Yorke sent Andy to Highfield with the newspapers, which always went from one house to the other.

"You can manage to do that much, I dare say," he said, coldly, as the boy prepared delightedly for his walk. "Now start off."

"Come a little way with me, Sis," cried Andy, holding the papers under his arm with intense pride. "I've got to go to the Court at dusk, you know, and that will be before I come back. Come, Sis."

The brother and sister started off together, and old Mr. Yorke, his hard, handsome face impassive as usual, stood on the doorstep, with his pipe in his mouth, congratulating himself that, as he was unfortunate enough to have an idiot son, he had, too, a beautiful daughter, who would yet be the making of his house, and worth more to him than the finest boy in the county.

"You shall stay just here, Sis," said Andy, patronisingly, when they reached the stile that led from the Glen coppice.

But she walked on until she came in sight of the high road, and within one meadow of Blarney—the pretty little estate which Colonel Power had bought some ten years before, and

named in memory of the spot where he had first met his wife, 'in those famous Irish days,' as he always called the months he had been quartered in Ireland.

"I will stay here, Andy," said Brenda. "I shall watch you out of sight, and then go slowly towards home along the river bank. I shall either meet you when I come out upon the road again, or you will overtake me."

She could not see the house from where she sat upon the stile, but she could catch a glimpse of the lawn; and that spot she watched with eagerness. Perhaps Mrs. Power might come out for a little time in the pleasant evening stillness; for though she was so great an invalid, Brenda had heard of her strolling a little way upon her daughter's arm. Perhaps the young French lady, with those keen black eyes, which were turned to her so often in church, might pass along the gravelled drive. Perhaps, better than all, Miss Power herself—the "Gertie" of whom Sir Wilfred spoke, the bright-faced young English lady whom Brenda had so often seen and admired through this short, sweet Summer — would stroll out here upon the turf, and stop a moment within sight.

This house was very different from Glen Court. Brenda felt no breathless awe of the grandeur and beauty, as she did whenever she saw the tall towers and wide, far-reaching park. Thinking this, she recalled how she had first gone to see the Court, when Sir Wilfred's stately old housekeeper had offered to show her over the house; how she had started back with quickened breath when she timidly entered the pillared hall, where the pictures looked down on her like a crowd of human faces, and flowers bloomed around her as they had never done even in dreams, yet as some day they might perhaps do once again. And then she recalled, with beating pulses, that beautiful picture of the peasant girl; and her thoughts ran on from it, far and fast, in a joyous strain.

"If he were ashamed of that marriage he would have destroyed the picture," she said, her hands clasped together, and her eyes bright and excited; "and if he were ashamed of—of another such marriage, he would not be so true to me. At first I thought it could not be, and I tried to prevent his growing nearer and nearer, dearer and dearer to me. It was easy then, because of course I did not love him so—so deeply as I do now. Then it got harder and harder, and still I tried with all my strength; and then I found it need not be. Oh, what joy for me!—what a deep, deep, undeserved blessing! Day after day he asks me now that one question—will I be his wife?—his wife! And my answer can be only one when I give it at last 'Love, when we two are all the world to each other, what world is their left to vex us with their wonderings?' So he whispers

when I ask him what those who know us both will say ; and in it all my heart answers to his. Oh, Wilfred ! " she cried in her thoughts, hiding her face in her hands, " I am but an ignorant peasant girl, but I know we shall be happy. I will learn so gladly all you teach me ; and—perhaps, in my vanity, I am learning to believe what you tell me—I don't think it would be very hard to be a lady at your side : lowly always in my heart, though, remembering how good our Father has been."

Just then, in the clear evening stillness, a quick sharp cry pierced Brenda's ears, and she was standing upright on the stile before its echo died. Among the well-trimmed shrubs upon the little patch of green, she saw a lady standing close to the entrance-gate, as if listening and waiting—a short, slight girl, in a purple dress with amber trimmings, her head surrounded by one heavy plait.

Brenda knew that this was the French lady who had been Gertrude Power's governess, and she wondered whether any one in that quiet garden could have uttered the terrified cry which she had fancied to be Andy's.

Suddenly the girl she was watching sprang forward, and held the gate closed ; and at this moment Andy rushed up to it, outside, his hat off, his hair flying, and his eyes piteous in their vacant fear. He put his awkward fingers on the latch, looking up with pleading eagerness into the lady's face.

" Let me in ! " he cried—Brenda could distinguish each sharp word—" he's coming after me ! "

There was no answer, but Brenda saw the girl's hand still upon the closed gate, and a broad, contemptuous smile upon her lips. Without waiting an instant, she darted across the field ; but at the end there was no gate, and the high hedge barred her from the lawn and from Andy. Another shriek reached her from the boy, as a snappish little terrier ran and jumped around him, barking viciously.

" Oh ! let me in—he's mad ! "

" Mad ! " echoed the girl, in a cool, foreign voice. " It's not the dog that is mad. You cannot come in here. Go home, and don't be a coward."

Brenda could even hear how, with quiet amusement, the dog was encouraged to keep barking and snapping at Andy's legs ; and her voice had a ring of anger in it, as she called through the hedge—

" Andy, come, dear, walk towards me. Don't run ; the dog will not hurt you."

" Your sister seems to know a great deal about the dog," observed the French girl, scornfully ; " but he *can* bite if he likes."

" Oh, where are you, Sis ? " cried Andy, despairingly. " I'm afraid of going anywhere from here."

"Take your hand from the gate, infant!" cried Louise Gartret, imperatively. "We don't want you or your sister about here. Go home."

"Take the dog away—oh! take him away! He's biting me now! Oh, take him away!" prayed the boy again.

With a long, satirical laugh, Louise watched the spiteful little animal in his antics, until Brenda at last found a way through the hedge. She sprang down into the road, and when she joined her brother at the gate, where he still clung to the bars, her cheeks were hot and flushed, and her eyes flashing brilliantly—such a contrast to the cool face looking at her from within the barrier which Andy had prayed in vain to pass.

"Louise, Louise, why don't you call Snap in? Oh! I have been so vexed with you! I saw from the window, and could not leave mamma, or get any one to hear me."

The young voice which uttered these words was pained and pitiful, and Brenda looked up gratefully from Andy's distressed face, to meet Miss Power's apologetic glance.

"Miss Yorke, I am so truly sorry your brother should have been frightened by my dog. He is naturally snappish, but a word from any of us quiets him in a moment." She broke off a branch of lilac, as she spoke, and struck the dog across the ears. He cowered down at her feet in a moment. "A word would have done this at first. If he ever terrifies you again," she added, gently, to Andy, "he shall be kept in—like boys who are naughty in school."

Louise Gartret laughed a sharp little laugh, staring all the time into Brenda's face.

"If you had kept your brother with you, it would have saved all this," she said; and her eyes grew darkly vicious as they scanned the girl's surpassing beauty. "But I suppose he is often in the way; even an idiot must be in the way during some of your walks, according to all accounts."

"Louise," cried Gertrude, quickly, "how can you speak so? How dare you speak so, here within our gates?"

"Good night, Miss Power, and thank you," said Brenda, ignoring Mademoiselle Gartret's very presence, with that simple natural dignity of hers which always amused and charmed Sir Wilfred.

"Good night," said Gertie, pleasantly. "I am indeed very sorry that you have been alarmed, and I hope it may never occur again."

And Brenda took her brother by the hand quite silently, thinking she should love Gertrude Power all her life; but—"Hush! Andy, never mind *her*!" she said aloud, as Andy's twitching lips uttered almost her very thought.

"Oh! I hate her, Sis!—I hate her!"

"Why, Andy dear, you don't know what hate means," laughed Brenda, gently; "nor do I. What have we to do with hating?"

"Brenda," whispered Andy, in his earnestness calling her by her name, as he seldom did, "she wanted to kill me."

"Nonsense, nonsense," interrupted Brenda, quickly. "She was only—only slow in opening the gate, Andy."

"And she said something wicked to you, Sis—I saw it by your eyes. Oh! I hate her!"

"Never mind talking of this, dear," said Brenda, soothingly. Now if you are really going to Glen Court, you had better set off. Hasten after me. What did Mac say to you?"

"He was out, so he didn't say anything."

She had only been left a few minutes, when she met Malcolm Vaughan on his way home. He started at sight of her pale face, and so she told him how Andy had been frightened, and how pleasant Miss Power had been.

"She is pleasant, people say," answered Malcolm, quietly. "Every one who knows her loves her."

"I should think they would," assented Brenda, heartily; "but I have never happened to hear much of her, though I've lived so near her for this summer."

"Have you not?" he asked, walking beside her, but not turning to her; "not from Sir Wilfred?"

"No," she answered, simply, "they are old friends, I know, but he never speaks much of her."

"How strange!"

She turned suddenly to him, her eyes full of one great question.

"They have grown up," said Malcolm, calmly, as though he avoided her gaze still, and folded his hands behind him, because they told too plainly of his nervousness; "they have grown up in the understanding that they were to marry each other. Mrs. Power's hope is that they will marry before her death; and that hope she has told Sir Wilfred. Years ago—*up to* a year ago,—he was very fond of her. How he *loved* her I do not know, but he was certainly fond of her; and the mother rejoiced with all her heart. Colonel Power gave Sir Wilfred his sanction before he died; and though perhaps there has never been any definite engagement between him and Miss Power, their marriage has always, I think, been an understood thing. He is very often at Blarney now, and Mrs. Power rarely leaves her room, so there are only the two young ladies to visit."

"But he always says," began Brenda, with a sharp quiver in her voice, which made Vaughan's hands close more tightly over each other, "he always says it tires him, and he doesn't go at all often."

"Not so often as he goes—elsewhere, no," replied Malcolm,

still looking down upon the fallen leaves he crushed under his strong boots. "No, he goes far more seldom now than he used to do; and because of that it would be honourable in him to tell them why it is so. I feel sure they know," he added, quickly; "and it makes Miss Gertie sad, and Miss Gartret bitter and vindictive; but they should know it from his own lips—don't you think so, Brenda?"

She did not answer, and her eyes were far away.

"I think a man is right to woo the only woman whom he loves," said Malcolm, with gentle kindness, "and I do not blame Sir Wilfred Glenhore. Heaven only knows how hard it must be to give up one's love when it is within one's grasp! Few men or women could stand such a test, Brenda. Now I have told you, dear heart, what we Glen folks have known so long. Your father knew it, but I suppose has never mentioned it to you. With a wonderful power in your own hands, which many things have given you besides your beauty, Brenda, there is a wonderful responsibility too. But even though it lead you to a life which is new and strange, I know you will be happy in the love you have won, because you have won it nobly and purely. Do not misunderstand me, dear heart, and look so sadly away from me. I have told you nothing that need hurt you. How can Sir Wilfred help loving you best? And, loving you, how can he help but try, with all his great power, to win you? Everything else that you need know, he will tell you himself some day."

But she only answered his kind words with an involuntary sigh which came straight from her heart.

"Oh! if it had been anyone else!"

They had reached now the broad and shallow river that ran through the Glen, and on the other side a path led over the fields to Malcolm's farm. The water was shallow enough for him to cross with only a little wetting of his thick boots, and he stopped, asking her simply whether he should walk on with her, or bid her good-bye. She told him she was to join Andy, and then she went on along the shingly bank, towards the wide grey bridge which spanned the river a little lower down.

She was within a few yards of the arches, when a horseman cantered to the bridge. Suddenly, as he passed it, he caught sight of the young figure loitering in the twilight, and he reined in his horse with quick fingers.

"Quiet, quiet, Kate," he whispered, stroking his mare—who resented this unexpected pull up—and gently guiding her to the low stone wall.

"Brenda," he said, looking down upon her, his eyes full of gladness, "come up to the road, dear. Kate objects to jumping this, and if you leave me to decide between you, I shall leave her."

"Pay take care of your horse, Sir Wilfred," said Brenda, looking up with a strange brightness in her eyes—a brightness that deepened with love and pain as she fixed them on the handsome, longing face. "In this case the mountain cannot come to Mahomet, and Mahomet objects to coming to the mountain."

"Come, Brenda," he entreated in his low, wooing tones, "come up for just one minute, my beauty. I was idiot enough to send Wood on home. Come to me."

"I am waiting here for Andy," she answered, looking round with supreme nonchalance.

"Is Andy at the Court?"

"I hope not. I hope he is on his way home."

"He went there, did he, you saucy child?"

"He went there an hour ago, Sir Wilfred."

"Then he will bring you a book, my darling, which I left to be given him, if he came before I returned."

"What a pity, for I hardly ever read," replied Brenda, leaning coolly against a bare old pollard on the river bank, and breaking off a twig with restless fingers.

"What a false assertion!" said Sir Wilfred, surprised. "You will read the book I have chosen for you, Brenda? Tell me you will."

"How can I, Sir Wilfred, when I have not seen it?" she answered, looking up at him for one second, and turning her eyes away again to the river quickly. "I—don't think I shall read it."

"You will not come up to me; you will not promise me what I ask. Brenda, why is this, my love?"

Her lips quivered with pain, and she bent her head, that the brim of her hat might hide the yearning of her eyes.

"Brenda," he continued, in a voice of quick earnestness, "if you treat me with this coquetry, simply to make me love you more madly than ever, I can tell you at once that you have no need to try, for my love is fierce enough without such a spur."

Lower and lower went the shading hat, and tears had gathered in the yearning eyes, when two huntsmen rode up, and greeted Sir Wilfred.

"I say, Glenhore, what fish do you see over there? Come, this is your way. Join us over here."

He mounted quickly, not wishing to bring them up to where he stood, and the three rode out of sight together.

Brenda had hardly gained the bridge when Andy overtook her at a trot.

"Here it is," he cried, excitedly, "in a parcel, all tied and fast. Here, Sis. And, oh! I saw the pictures again at the Court."

"That one I told you of?" asked Brenda, absently.

"Yes, yes, I expect so ; but they were all mixed up together. They were all put like one big one—like people and gardens all over the walls. Oh ! yes, I saw them all, Sis, on purpose to tell you. Here, take the book. It's a beautiful colour. I picked a hole to see. It's just the colour of the sky. Is the sky this sort of thing when you're close to it ?"

"Andy, you know it is not, dear, when you just stop to think for a minute."

"Oh ! yes, I know when I stop to think. It isn't blue at all now, Sis. Ain't you going to take your book ?" he asked, holding the parcel towards her. "Here, take it."

"Carry it home for me, please, Andy," she said, almost in a whisper, and looking steadfastly away from it as he held it before her.

"But why? You must look at it. You haven't touched it yet."

"No, not yet. You carry it," she said again, putting her hands behind her. "Carry it just home for me, Andy, and I will think—I will think what to do with it."

CHAPTER V.

"THE BEGINNING OF THE END."

THERE was an ominous frown on Miss Glenhore's brow. She stood before one of the gallery windows at Glen Court, close to Sir Wilfred's dressing-room ; and beside her, on the cushioned seat, lay a neat white packet. Miss Glenhore's fingers tingled to open it, yet, by the contempt upon her lips, one would have judged that she would scorn to touch it. The frown was heavier than ever, when Sir Wilfred at last threw open his door, and came out into the gallery.

"You here, Aunt Clarissa ? Were you just about to serenade me in my room ?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Wilfred," she rejoined with stately impatience. "I have a parcel here."

"Over which you are keeping guard, eh ?" he answered carelessly ; but her eyes were quick to note his swift vexed glance at it.

"I see you know from whom it comes," she said, coldly.

"Yes, I know from whom it comes," replied Sir Wilfred, taking it up, and trying to hide the disappointment which had crept into his voice when he saw that Brenda had returned the present which he had made her with such love and hope and tenderness.

"Is it from that girl at the farm?" asked Miss Glenhore, curtly.

"I know many farms and many girls," answered Sir Wilfred, with quiet scorn, "which do you mean?"

"I mean Mr. Yorke's daughter, of course."

"Then why not say Miss Yorke? Yes, there is here a book which I—lent her a few days ago, and which she has returned to me. I am going now, aunt. I shall see you this evening at Blarney, if I don't get home before."

"Stay—you must stay a minute, Wilfred," cried his aunt, detaining him with her hand. "I must ask you one thing before you go. I have been trying to ask it for some time past, but you have always managed to prevent me."

"Well?" asked Sir Wilfred, leaning easily against the window opposite her, and putting the parcel under his arm. "Ask, and you shall be answered."

"What is this girl to you?"

"Which girl?"

"Oh! pray be less tiresome," cried Miss Glenhore, trying to keep down her anger, but tapping impatiently with her foot upon the carpet. "If you will have it, then, what is this Miss Yorke to you?"

"The dearest friend I have; the best, the most beloved," said Sir Wilfred, slowly and earnestly, forgetting even the cruel packet under his arm.

"Wilfred!"—Miss Glenhore's voice was almost a shriek—"what do you mean?"

"What I say, aunt."

"What you say!—what you were mad enough to say!"

"Nothing less, but rather a great deal more."

"You mean—you mean——"

"I cannot stand this sort of scene, Aunt Clarissa," replied Sir Wilfred, rising good-humouredly from his lounging attitude. "Let us make it short. I am sorry that you do not know (because you *will* not know) the girl whom I hope soon to bring here as my wife. When she is so, I hope you will make up for it all. As for loving her when once you know her, why, you simply could not help it if you tried, Aunt Clarissa."

"Wilfred, think what you are saying," she cried, her voice sharp with fear. "Do you insinuate that she is coming here—to Glen Court—as your wife—as—Lady Glenhore?"

"When she will," he answered simply, and with a bright light in his eyes,—"when she will, I shall bring her here with more pride. I take it, than had any of my grand old ancestors in bringing brides descended from a hundred earls—perhaps that may be a high figure of speech, Aunt Clarissa, but they were high dames most of them, so let it go."

"You are simply mad!" hissed Miss Clarissa, through her pale lips.

"Then all my eccentricities are explained in a word. Don't let the fact get wind, for it will make my task of winning Brenda all the harder. Think of her accepting a lunatic!"

"She's used enough to mad people," ejaculated Miss Glenhore, sneeringly.

"Hold hard there, please," put in Sir Wilfred, hastily. "Such an affliction should not be spoken of so; and I, at any rate, will not wait to hear it. Do you think I can love Brenda as I do, and hear her family jeered at? Cannot you say these things aloud to yourself, aunt, when no one is by? It would have just the same effect as saying them to me, and be a good deal more soothing for us both. That's all, Aunt Clarissa. Now I am going."

And he went, only re-entering his room for a minute to lock up Brenda's parcel, with the one thought which was with him in all his love, "She cannot be anything but true to me. She *cannot*, let her do and say whatever she may, in her girlish freaks and coquetry. She has almost told me how she loves me. What is there in the whole world that should change her?"

And Miss Glenhore, standing still where he had left her, and watching him as he strolled down the avenue with his dogs at his heels, bit her lip until the blood started, and decided that this must be stopped by some means—ay, by any means that might be in her power. And her power was as wide as it was vindictive.

* * * * *

In the churchyard in the Glen (a wild, uncared-for spot, which few kind or loving hands had cared to beautify, and where the tombstones were more than half hidden in the grass, while many of the darkened head-stones leaned sideways to the earth, as if they, too, as it had been with those who slept below, bent tiredly beneath their load of years), stood Brenda Yorke, listening while Andy stumbled through the words engraved upon one great square stone.

"I can read them better than I used to, Sis," he cried, clapping his hands delightedly, when he reached the end of the second line. "I read as well as you now, only of course I miss out the long words."

"Of course," assented Brenda, smiling. "Go on, Andy."

She had one hand on the boy's shoulder, and her eyes were following his. The shadows passed over them softly, as the night clouds chased each other through the keen November air. Standing so, in the flickering light and flying shade, the young figure, in its beauty, was like a picture or a dream.

Sir Wilfred Glenhore, strolling up with his gun upon his shoulder, turned quietly, and sent his keeper to Blarney with

part of the game he carried; and then, taking the rest in the hand that held the gun, he walked up the churchyard, and stood behind Brenda and Andy, listening.

" 'Kind were our niggers,' " pronounced Andy, deliberately. And in Brenda's laugh Sir Wilfred joined with spontaneous heartiness.

She started and looked round, putting her hat on hastily, while the colour deepened in her cheeks.

"Teach me to read it, Brenda," he said, his eyes full of gladness, as he took her hand.

"Sir Wilfred can't read it, Sis, and I can," cried Andy, dancing in his glee.

"Let me try," returned Sir Wilfred, standing before the gravestone, his gun still on his shoulder, and his right hand still holding Brenda's.

" 'A just sufficiency we had in life
Our children duteous to myself and wife
Kind were our neighbours open and sincere
May we in Heaven together all appear'

Well done, Jacob Evans and his wife," continued Sir Wilfred, glancing up at the name. "In their immense content, they did not stand on punctilio. Brenda, do you think they are really as satisfied as they wish spectators to believe?"

"Spectators do not seem to believe it."

"It is a shame to call the assertion in question when Jacob is so decided about it. If he considered he had a 'just sufficiency,' of course he had! But why should he care to tell us so, when it is too late to congratulate him?"

"Then have we all a 'just sufficiency' if we consider we have, Sir Wilfred?" asked Brenda, with her pretty, half-wistful smile.

"Decidedly so, my darling. What but our own content can make our lives sufficient for us?"

"And how are we to win the content?"

"Shall I tell you? May I tell you?"

"Yes, Sir Wilfred, if you know."

Her voice seemed strangely still and quiet, after his impassioned tones.

"You ask how we are to win content, you and I—for of no one else need we speak. My dearest—my dearest in all the world,—your love is all I ask to make me a hundred times content; and for yourself, if love can make you so, ah, surely you must be content this moment."

She did not answer him a word, and he spoke a little more gently.

"I suppose our names will be upon the marble there with us; but though we must be very, very happy, we will not tell posterity we had a just sufficiency, will we, darling?"

"I have a fancy," said Brenda, very quietly, "that my name will never be read here at all."

"Have you a dislike for the place?"

"No, no. I have loved it very dearly, and I have never thought this before—never before. But somehow now I feel as if I had no part here—as if this little churchyard belonged to a wonderful dream, from which I was awaking."

"You are tired, my love," said Sir Wilfred, tenderly; "come away. Wherever your name is, mine must be. That is all I care about."

"Yours, of course, will be in there," said Brenda, with a little laugh, as she roused herself, "and there will be a whole biography added, and then a long eulogium. I wonder whether it will be as true as poor Jacob's 'just sufficiency.'"

"It depends, dear," he said, gaily, "on what my life is made for me."

"I see," mused Brenda, comically, though there was a little catch in her voice. "Then if you lead an indolent and careless one, Sir Wilfred, I hope it will be engraved upon the marble that it was made for you, and that you were not responsible."

"Brenda, hush, my sweet! You are cruel in your light reproofs; because"—his voice was very grave and very earnest now—"because no word of yours falls really lightly on my ear. No one has ever spoken to me as you do, Brenda; and though your words may sometimes make me angry and impatient, they never are unheeded, and they often pain me in their truth."

"Andy," called Brenda, quietly setting aside the young baronet's words, as she often did when they took this tone after one of her rebukes, "are you ready? Good-bye, Sir Wilfred."

"I am coming to the farm," he said, but looked in vain for the pleasure in her face. "I have business with Mr. Yorke."

At the fold-gate they came upon the farmer, and Sir Wilfred, hanging the game on Andy's arm, and telling him to give it to Patience, and raising his hat to Brenda as she passed on, stopped with Mr. Yorke.

An hour afterwards he entered the busy kitchen, where Brenda was placing the tea-things, and her father followed him, rubbing his hands with obsequious satisfaction.

"So many things, Sir Wilfred," he was saying. "I cannot believe you will do all that to the farm, sir."

Sir Wilfred—his head uncovered—was stopping to prop his gun in a corner of the kitchen. His face was rather flushed when he raised it.

"My only fear is lest I forget something," he said. "I should like a list of all that you—of all that I found necessary. If you will just write it down, Miss Brenda, I will see that everything is done. It will be a great pleasure to me to do this, and any-

thing more that your daughter may suggest, Mr. Yorke; not the slightest thing she writes shall be forgotten."

"You are very good, sir," said the old man, glancing with gratified pride into his daughter's face. "Sir Wilfred is very good to his tenants, isn't he, Brenda?"

"Do you do these things for all your tenants, Sir Wilfred?" she asked, looking up almost pleadingly into his face. But he only laughed.

"Brenda," reproved her father, really angry, though he tried to hide it, "you know how kind Sir Wilfred is to all his tenants. You know what Malcolm Vaughan is always saying about him."

It was her turn to colour now; and the young man, understanding in a moment her father's implied falsehood, and loving her too dearly to deceive her in the slightest degree, answered, with frank honesty—

"Personally I have done nothing at all for Mr. Vaughan, though I believe my steward has seen after one or two things. Personally I have neither done anything, nor cared to do anything, for any family on my estate except your own, Mr. Yorke. If those who act for me do not do it, I suppose it remains undone."

"I feared so. I feared it was done only for us," said Brenda, as her father moved away.

"Only for you," replied Sir Wilfred, standing before her to prevent her going, and looking down into her face with eager love in his eyes; "only for you; and you know why, Brenda, and you know what reward I claim. Give me my reward, and you shall claim what indulgence you will for all the other people—who will have a claim upon *you* then, as much as upon myself."

It was come once more, this question, the very shadow of which had gilded all the Summer, and the room was still, and they were alone. She did not hear the heavy ticking of the clock. She did not hear the hundred sounds without. She only heard, ringing in her own heart, the echo of those strong, loving words which had come straight from his. It could only have been a few moments that they had stood there, opposite each other, in silence—he trying to be patient, she trying to be strong—when Andy ran in.

"Sir Wilfred," he cried, "here's a strange dog and a man! Come and see 'em!"

With a disappointed shadow in his eyes, Sir Wilfred said good-bye to Brenda, and followed Andy from the room, leaving his gun behind him.

"He's gone," said Andy, running in again presently. "He said he'd come back for his gun, but we weren't to touch it. What does it look like when you see down it, Sis?"

"Andy, Andy, come away!" she called, as the boy bent his face to the muzzle of the gun. "Never do that again, my dear—never touch that again."

CHAPTER VI.

"A LOVER TRUE."

THE six o'clock dinner was over at Blarney, and Sir Wilfred Glenhore sauntered across the hall to the drawing-room, wishing he had not stayed quite so long musing alone over his wine.

"Pardon, Gertie," he cried, raising his eyebrows as he glanced at the timepiece. "I had no idea it was tea-time."

"I dare say it is not quite tea-time," said Gertrude Power, from the tea-table, which had been wheeled into the drawing-room, urn and all, in good old-fashioned style. "I think meals are always a little anticipated here."

"At any rate, Gertie always says so if her guests are late," added Louise Gartret, as Sir Wilfred came up to her on the rug.

"I wonder which is the greater virtue," ruminated Sir Wilfred, lazily, "to utter disagreeable truths or agreeable falsehoods."

"At any rate, they are both better than uttering disagreeable falsehoods," laughed Gertie; and Sir Wilfred smiled across at her, thinking how hard it would be for her to utter truth or falsehood disagreeably.

"I did not mean to be late for dinner, Mademoiselle Gartret," he explained, courteously, "but I was unavoidably detained by one of my tenants. So I sent home for my bag, and came on as I was."

"I noticed that you came up in your sporting dress," she said, turning keen, bright eyes upon him; "but where did you leave your gun? I am afraid you will have to go back for it."

"I left it at Glen Farm," he answered, with perfect coolness, as his laughing eyes met hers and took in her suspicions at a glance; "and half the game I had bagged I left there, for the benefit of Mr. Yorke, and his son and his daughter, and his manservant and his maid-servant."

"That Mr. Yorke is the most disagreeable-looking old man I ever saw," remarked Louise, narrowly watching the effect of her words. "And his son ought to be in an idiot asylum; but the daughter is rather a pretty-looking dairy-maid."

A hot, fierce flame burned in Sir Wilfred's cheeks. He looked down upon the hard features and glittering eyes of this shallow woman who had dared to speak to him so of Brenda, and then the concentrated scorn in his voice made her wince a little.

"Your experience is unlimited. I have not yet learned a dis-

tion between the beauty of a dairy-maid and the beauty of a drawing-room maid. Beauty is the same, whoever possesses it; and as for Miss Yorke's, it far surpasses the beauty of any other face I have ever looked upon."

"A very courteous speech," replied Louise Gartret, sarcastically, "considering Miss Power's presence."

"Gertie," he began, joining her, and speaking gently again, "you, I know, understand me."

"Yes," she answered, looking frankly up into his face, "of course, I understand so simple a truth. Miss Yorke is wonderfully beautiful; and why should you not say so?"

"I believe, Sir Wilfred, that if your words stabbed Gertie to the heart, she would hide the pain they gave her," remarked Louise, watching them both superciliously, and tapping her foot upon the rug as she stood.

"A very ineffectual concealment," returned Sir Wilfred, coldly, "if some one else is always present to lay it bare. Gertie, I never meant to pain you. I quite meant to leave the dining-room with you this evening, yet somehow I forgot."

Gertie smiled in pleasant amusement at this lame excuse, and Sir Wilfred placed Miss Gartret's chair for her—his own easy courteous self again, whatever she might be.

They took their tea together pleasantly, and then Miss Power went to the piano. Louise Gartret threw herself into a low chair beside the fire; her long pink dress lay in folds upon the rug, her slight dark hands were folded on her knees, and her eyes, under their half-closed lids, were fixed upon the two figures at the other end of the room.

"Shall I sing it, then?" asked Gertie of her companion.

"Please. My mind is incapable to-night of soaring above a simple ballad, 'Spinning was young—'"

Prettily and purely, Gertie sang Molloy's then popular ballad; and when she rose, saying she must go to her mother for a few minutes, Sir Wilfred, after opening the door for her, sauntered lazily back to the fire, humming still—

"She was a sad coquette,
He was a lover true."

"That could not be said of Gertie," began Miss Gartret, rather insinuatingly.

"Neither you nor I," replied Sir Wilfred, shortly, "said it of Gertie, I believe."

"She is exactly the opposite of a coquette," resumed Louise, turning her half-closed eyes upon the fire.

"I should agree with you, I'm sure, Mademoiselle," returned the baronet, gallantly, "if I knew what the exact opposite would be."

"I mean that dear Gertrude is entirely guided by her feelings, and takes no pains to hide them."

"It's always a pity to take pains," answered Sir Wilfred, with languid sarcasm; "the inevitable medicines for their removal are so excessively unpleasant."

"She is a most innocent child," continued Mademoiselle, quite closing her eyes a moment to hide their angry sparkle, "and with a child's persistency she sets her heart upon one object, and cares for nothing besides."

"A good plan," spoke Sir Wilfred, warmly. "My experience of childhood is, that it gains every object on which it sets its heart."

"You always wilfully misunderstand me, Sir Wilfred," Louise said, losing her forced patience. "You know what I mean you to understand—that Gertie's heart is sore at your neglect, and that Mrs. Power is daily growing worse in her anxiety for your engagement to be spoken of openly between yourself and her."

"Has Mrs. Power commissioned you to say this to me?" asked Sir Wilfred, his face white with passion.

"Well, not exactly; but——"

"Has Miss Power commissioned you?" he interrupted, with proud quietness.

"No, Gertie is too shy, and——"

"Then, Mademoiselle," he went on, restraining himself with an effort, "we English do not speak of these things as you seem to imagine, and no English lady would take for granted an engagement which has never been spoken of in her presence."

"The side window must be open, Sir Wilfred—would you very kindly see, for I feel it chilly?"

Sir Wilfred, pacing the room slowly, knew that Miss Gartret had said this because Gertie had entered, and as he did her bidding, he could not but smile at the perfect address of the girl.

"Mamma sent me down, Wilfred," said Gertie, her soft, pleasant voice falling refreshingly upon his irritated ears. "She told me to tell you that she had hoped to return and sit with us a little, but, as the evening is far advanced, she feels now that she dare not venture. Look, Wilfred, I have gathered you one of the last of my fuchsias. Is it not beautiful for the time of year?"

"Beautiful!" he exclaimed, heartily, taking it into his hand, but not offering to put it into his coat, where were fastened a fading nasturtium and a sprig of mignonette.

"How glad you will be to replace those withered things!" remarked Louise Gartret, smiling.

But still he held the fuchsia, and kept the faded flowers in their place.

"I don't like to see a gentleman's coat decorated with cottage flowers," she continued, laughing.

"Cottage flowers!" echoed Sir Wilfred, good-humouredly. "These flowers in my button-hole never flourished in a cottage, Miss Gartret."

She saw with what an effort he restrained himself once more, but she had not the tact to cease her provoking words.

"Oh!" she said, lowering her eyes. "And farm flowers rank one degree higher than cottage flowers, Sir Wilfred?"

He flashed a look into her unmoved, downcast face, and hot words rose from his heart; but instantly Gertie spoke with nervous haste.

"I wish Miss Glenhore could have come with you to-night, Wilfred. She sent me word this morning that her cold was better, and so we all hoped to see her."

"I do not know why she did not come, Gertie; she generally is anxious to do so, as you know. It seems just as if she had some other engagement, though I cannot imagine that she really had."

"Louise has missed her, I fear" smiled Gertie, kindly touching her governess's hand. "She and Miss Glenhore are such great friends, you know."

"Very great," assented Sir Wilfred, meaningly, as he wondered why Louise had coloured. "They have many plans and hopes in common, I believe."

"Miss Glenhore," said Louise, slowly as she looked fully up at last, "has many painful communications made to her in this gossiping country, and she seeks sympathy, which I am proud to give—and help, which I would gladly offer, if I had it in my power; and we speak together of our common love for our darling Gertie."

Understanding Sir Wilfred's steady, ironical gaze, she found herself compelled to drop her keen eyes again; and then he turned to Miss Power with an air of relief.

"Take me down the lawn, Gertie; it is a beautiful night, and not a bit too cold, if you put on your cloak." And as they walked out of hearing of Mademoiselle Gartret, who lingered at the hall-door, he spoke to her with a real anxiety in his voice. "Gertie, why, in the name of everything inexplicable, does she stay with you? Let her go back to her native soil—let her go anywhere away from here."

"Poor Louise!" smiled Gertie. "I think you do not understand her."

"Oh! I understand her," he replied, hastily, "and a very contemptible puzzle she is to understand."

"I wish you liked her better, Wilfred. I feel that I owe her much for her unsought and undeserved devotion to us."

"Devotion! If that is devotion, preserve me from devotees! I hate her, and you don't love her, Gertie, say what you will."

"Oh! Wilfred, I do," she answered, with more eagerness than she would have thought of using if the words had sprung from her heart.

"I despise her!" ejaculated the young baronet again, vehemently; "and I hate my aunt Clarissa, when I remember it was she who brought her to you. Gertie, if you had been another sort of girl, she would long ago have tainted you with her vile suspicion and mistrust, and made you such a one as herself. She cannot do that, and so her mischief is harmless; but if I had a little sister of my own, I would rather lay her there in the desolate churchyard than give her over to such teaching."

"Louise's teaching days are over," answered Gertrude, gently. "Please do not imagine that I am a pupil any longer."

"Close companions are always unconsciously teaching each other, for good or ill," he said, still very earnest. "I can only hope that, as you will persist in keeping her with you, you yourself will be the teacher. Good night, now, little white fairy. Run in. I shall stay here until you are safely at home again."

He waited, as he had said, until she had called to him from the house door, and then he walked slowly on, thinking how different were the three girl-natures he knew so well; and his thoughts then, as ever, fixing themselves upon one only, in their intense and entire love. So through the stillness of the November night he walked slowly and thoughtfully on, watching the moon rise over the Glen, and creep behind the heavy clouds.

"If it were not for the clouds which are so thick to-night," he said, "in another hour it would be bright moonlight."

His nearest way was along the high road, but at the edge of the coppice he stood a few moments to consider; and while he did so, he heard Snap bark his short, sharp, warning bark.

"That's odd," mused Sir Wilfred. "Snap never barks after dark, except when some one passes; and he gave me my salute five minutes ago—snappish enough it was, but soon over when I spoke to him. This one seems to have been silenced in the same way. I wonder whether Gertie is sending after me?—I will wait a minute or two to see."

He called in the darkness, asking if any one was wanted; but there came back no answer. And a few minutes afterwards he passed into the coppice, and turned towards Glen Farm.



CHAPTER VII.

MISS GLENHORE'S TREACHERY.

It happened very rarely indeed that Patience Kempe and Mr. Yorke chanced to be away from home at the same time ; but this evening, just after Sir Wilfred had left the farm on his way to dine at Blarney, they set out together, for the purpose of seeing whether the purchase of the furniture belonging to one of their labourers, who was emigrating, would be a profitable speculation on their part. The kitchen was bright and neat, and in one corner of the low window-seat sat Brenda, while Andy lay against her, bending intently over an open book, and sucking his tongue energetically as he read.

"Aren't we happy, Sis ? " cried the boy, bending back to look up at her.

"Very happy," she answered, gently. "We always are, when we are together, Andy."

As she bent over him, stroking his white cheeks, and playing with his straight, soft hair, she heard a long rapping upon the outer door, and before she could move, it was quietly, but unceremoniously, opened from the outside, to admit a lady whom Brenda had never seen in that room before.

"Miss Glenhore—I beg your pardon," she exclaimed, rising from her seat, and flushing as she brought forward a chair, and stood shyly by it.

Miss Glenhore bowed stiffly, her eyes fixed upon Andy, who had left his corner in the shuttered window, and nestled up to Brenda, timid and shrinking as he always was when gazed at coldly or unkindly.

"I will not ask you to go into the parlour, Miss Glenhore, because there is no fire there," said Brenda, simply.

The quiet, ladylike manners of this girl, who did the honours of the firelit kitchen with a graceful ease which Miss Glenhore herself had never shown in the great reception rooms at Glen Court, struck her oddly. She turned her curious eyes on the hand that lay on the back of the wooden chair, and to the dark eyes, so beautiful in the firelight ; and then she felt that the part she had come to perform to-night would be very easy, and the part which she meant Sir Wilfred to perform would be very hard.

"The face is pure, however warm and tender," she said to herself ; "proud, however lowly ; and so my words will do their work. But there is something which makes me sorely fear for Wilfred."

"You are Mr. Yorke's daughter, I presume, and this is his son," she began, turning slowly from one to the other.

"Yes, I am Brenda Yorke, Miss Glenhore; and this is my brother Andrew."

"Will you send him from the room? I wish to speak to you alone."

"You hear, Andy?" said Brenda, too proud to make an excuse for sending him away. "Will you go, dear?"

Her gentle smile and touch upon his shoulder prevented the dismissal giving him pain, and he went away. Then Brenda sat down beside the fire opposite Miss Glenhore, and for the first time glanced fully at her.

She was an old lady, though she had fair, unsilvered hair, and wore a youthful dress. Her face, though unlined by care, was unsoftened by tenderness; her eyes, though cold and shallow, had an unshrinking cruelty in them; her lips were tight and proud. It might have been that no quiver had ever stirred them, and no warm kisses had they ever given—no kiss of love or penitence in the years long ago, no kiss of peace or pardon now that the years were closing in. Would any pitying, pardoning lips ever seek them in the years to come?

"I will not try to hide from you the reason of my visit," she said at once, watching the effect of every word; "you must have guessed it from the moment I entered."

"No," said Brenda, "not exactly, Miss Glenhore."

"Quite near enough, I daresay," she answered brusquely. "You know that I am not accustomed to visiting Sir Wilfred's tenants, and so, in your surprise at seeing me, you must have sought a reason in your mind."

"Is it about Sir Wilfred?" asked the girl, simply.

"Yes," replied Miss Glenhore, her gaze growing keener and more scrutinising, "it is about Sir Wilfred Glenhore. I hear that he spends a part of every day loitering about here."

"I think not," said Brenda, calmly: "we do not see him, and I do not think he would care to do so."

"Well, that may be an exaggeration; but it is true that he meets you alone, whenever he can."

Something in the tone, more than the words, brought a shamed blush into Brenda's face, and she was silent, simply for fear of trusting her voice.

"Yes, you know that is true," exclaimed Miss Clarissa, "you know that it is true that you, an English girl—little more than a child, one might say, by your look,—allow your father's good name to be lightly spoken of in all the county, simply to give amusement to the young baronet under whom, unfortunately, you chance to live. You cannot even have reached the age you have reached, without knowing that young men of high station often do find

amusement in talking and idling with those in a very much lower position than themselves; and Sir Wilfred Glenhore is no exception to the rule. He is restless, and enjoys any new pleasure which comes in his way, though he invariably afterwards regrets the hours he has spent in such so-called pleasure. I have heard him do so—I hear him do so now, oftener and more bitterly than ever—and I am sorry, in my heart, for the indolence and restlessness which have, for the time, led him to seek it. His is a much more thoughtful nature than you can imagine, and he knows well what is right, and how far he is from being right when he is acting falsely. He regrets doing so, even to you, though it always seems to me that, in these cases, the blame is the girl's alone. She ought, at any rate, to feel the shame of encouraging such a feeling. You need not hold your tears back so obstinately; I like to see them. They please me, because they show me that there is some feeling left in you—some sense of shame and impropriety. I think you never can before have thought of this matter, else you would have seen your own wrong-doing. I am willing to be the one to open your eyes, for probably you have no one about you at home here, capable or willing to do so. People are so easily flattered by the attentions of a gentleman like my nephew. I daresay" (the lady's voice grew harder and more anxious here) "you even deluded yourself into the belief that he meant you to understand that he would make you—his wife."

There was a certain frightened eagerness in Miss Glenhore's way of pronouncing these words, which sounded oddly in their forced assurance; but Brenda scarcely noticed it. The unshed tears still glistened under her eyelids, and she could not yet trust herself to answer.

"If he, in his recklessness, has done so," resumed Miss Glenhore, with a hard, stern passion in her voice, "even young and uneducated as you are, you must have had the sense to know he never meant it. You have a certain beauty which may perhaps have momentarily fascinated him—perhaps even may fascinate him always while he is with you—but its fascination is of short duration, and a deep regret follows. Tell me," she added, chafing at the girl's silence, "what he has said to you in his mad thoughtlessness."

"What Sir Wilfred Glenhore has said to me," replied Brenda, quietly, "has been answered to himself. If he had intended you to know it, Miss Glenhore, I think he would have told you himself."

The lady's tight lips grew tighter, and her next words seemed to force themselves hurriedly through.

"Think of this house in which you have grown up; of your father working with his hands for his daily bread; of your idiot

brother, who can never be anything but an object of charity; of yourself, a thoroughly low-born and uneducated girl, accustomed all your life to hard, rough work, and the companionship of country labourers—think of all these things, and then of Sir Wilfred Glenhore, brought up in refinement and luxury, accustomed to the society of the most elegant and educated in the land, and feeling keenly what true nobility and pure breeding are. *Then* tell me whether you think it within the bounds of possibility that he should, for one moment, dream of making you Lady Glenhore? If he has said it; he has said it in utter sarcasm. Even if it were possible that he had said it, *meaning* it, and would really marry you, you know, as well as I do, that he would bitterly repent it all his life. It would be a daily burden for him to have to bear, under which he would grow into a disappointed, miserable man. In his gleams of fondness, he may even tell you that it would not be so, but your own common sense will show you how little he could mean it; and I know that in calm moments, when you are not present, he acknowledges to himself that it would be a mad throwing away of his life. It would be a novelty, he says, for a few days, or perhaps months, but not worth the long, regretful years that would follow. You are silent, and your face shows me that you feel all I say."

The pause was so long that Brenda felt she must break it; so she answered what Miss Glenhore had evidently meant to be a question.

"I do feel it," she said, in a tone of simple, quiet certainty. "I feel your scorn and your contempt, but I do not recognise one of Sir Wilfred's words or thoughts in what you say."

"Long ago," Miss Glenhore went on, baffled and eager, "Sir Wilfred chose his wife—a wife in every way suited to him. He is with her now, while I talk to you, telling her, probably, how little he ever thinks of any one besides herself, and how he loves only her in all the world."

"He is not saying that," whispered Brenda, almost below her breath, and quite involuntarily.

Miss Glenhore caught the words, and with keen and bitter emphasis she repeated her glib falsehood.

"He has said it often and often to her; I have heard him."

The passionate eyes opposite her had no tears in them now, but a proud, bright, truthful flash.

"I will not say you are false to Sir Wilfred in speaking so to me, Miss Glenhore," Brenda said, "nor will I say you are false to yourself in uttering what is not true; but I will simply say that I cannot believe what you tell me. I could not, if I tried ever so hard, and I do not care to try. But that does not signify. Let us speak, please, of *your* motive in coming here to-night. You wish me to understand that, if Sir Wilfred has ever uttered

a word of love to me, it has been false and bitterly regretted; and you mean me to feel to the uttermost what a lasting degradation it would be to him to utter words of love to me which he *did* mean in truth and honour; and how unwomanly and unnatural it would be for me to believe in them, if he did so. Let me answer all these things, Miss Glenhore, and then I think your cruel words need not be repeated. You have no cause to fear that Sir Wilfred will ever marry a 'low-born, uneducated girl, accustomed all her life to hard, rough work and the companionship of country labourers.' Sir Wilfred's wife—as you wish—will never bring into his family connections whom *you* would scorn and despise, let *him* think of them as generously as he will. Are you satisfied, Miss Glenhore?"

"I think," she answered slowly, as she scanned the girl's pure, truthful face, "that you are speaking what you know to be true, and so I will rely upon your words. You assure me, you say,"—the question was emphatically deliberate and searching—"that I have no cause to fear that—you imagine my nephew would ever offer you his love in any serious spirit?"

"I mean," replied Brenda, bravely setting aside these words, "that Sir Wilfred Glenhore will never marry a low-born girl like myself."

The tone of pain in which the unselfish words were uttered was lost entirely on Miss Glenhore. She rose with an air of intense satisfaction.

"You have relieved me greatly," she said. "You see I accept your assertion, and rely upon it. I felt from the first that you would be honest with me, and I am satisfied. I have accepted even your simple word, and I will not detain you longer. You will not, I know"—Miss Glenhore was speaking now a little nervously—"betray this visit of mine, if you chance to see Sir Wilfred again. You can imagine that I have felt myself lowered by having to come here on such an errand. You will not mention it to any one?"

"No."

"Once more I trust your word. You have been a foolish, flippant girl this summer, easily deceived by flattery; but I feel that you are now speaking the truth to me. I can, too, excuse a little of your vanity," added Miss Glenhore, in a propitiatory tone; "it is natural, perhaps, as you possess unusual beauty; and indeed I can almost excuse my nephew's fickle fits of admiration. But I thought it only kind to come to you, and tell you what no one else seems to have had the honesty to tell you before. Good night."

She held out her hand, but Brenda did not raise her own, she only slightly bent her head as she opened the door.

"Good night," said Miss Glenhore again, looking curiously into

the girl's face. But the still lips framed no reply, and she passed out into the darkness and walked swiftly homewards, nervous and timid at being out alone so unusually late.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE MOONLIGHT.

"ANDY, Andy!" cried Brenda, half an hour afterwards, looking out into the night, as the moon rose slowly over the hill behind the towers of Glen Court. "Andy! Come, dear. Where are you?"

"Brenda standing at the door as usual," complained Patience, coming up the garden at that moment. "Why aren't you getting the supper?"

"I miss Andy," replied Brenda, anxiously; "have you seen him?"

"Never mind the boy," said Patience, moving past her; "he's safe enough, I'll warrant. Let's have supper, quick. If you'd walked two miles in the dark and cold, you'd be hungry enough to have put it ready. Your father'll be in, in a minute. The cloth isn't half laid—no glasses, I see."

"Oh, I forgot them. Somehow, Patience, I seem to be always getting a meal or putting it away. I wish we never needed meals."

"Don't talk rubbish, child. You wouldn't like it long. Bring those glasses one at a time. How often I tell you the same thing! A few journeys backwards and forwards can't hurt a strong young girl like you."

"I'm always making new blunders, you say, Patience; and yet I'm always doing the same thing day after day, and week after week. Oh! I'm so tired of the narrow——"

The broken cry came from the girl's full heart, but there were no words of love or sympathy to soothe and satisfy the yearning.

"I don't know what you expect, except what you have," rejoined Patience, practically, as she smoothed out her bonnet-strings before the fire. "Most farmers' daughters like their work, and are proud of it; and I'm sure you'll have to do more than you do now when you're a farmer's wife. Good gracious! what's that?"

A crash of glass broken on the red tiles, that was all; but Patience's ejaculation was hasty and vehement.

"I do verily believe you did it on purpose, to aggravate me!"

"I—think I could have helped it," answered Brenda, a wan

smile upon her face, and a quiver in her voice; "but it was not done to aggravate you, Patience."

"You naughty, careless girl!" exclaimed Miss Kempe, in high wrath. "A nice encouragement to buy cut tumblers for such handling!"

"Now, will you come to supper, Patience? Here's father ready, and he has heard all about my accident. Father," she added, gently, "I don't want any supper. May I go and find Andy, please?"

She went through the fold, calling "Andy, Andy!" at almost every step, but no young voice answered. "Andy, Andy, dear!" she cried, hastening through the meadows, guided by the fitful moonlight; yet no answer came. "Andy!"—a last and louder cry, as she stood at the wide gate which led from the fields into the road, near the bridge; and then a voice answered her—a laughing voice, that broke into a gay greeting, as Sir Wilfred Glenhore came up to her in one of the sudden gleams of moonlight.

"Little Brenda in search of her brother! Propitious fates which lured me hither."

"Oh! Sir Wilfred," began Brenda, thinking of nothing but her own anxiety, "have you met Andy?"

"No, dear. Is he wandering still, like that tiresome Jew, and are you in a perpetual search, like that still more tiresome Cœlebs?"

"He went away this evening, when Miss—when it was quite early, and I can't find him."

"We'll find him together, sweet," he said, deftly unfastening the chain of the gate. "I suppose he is sure to have gone to the coppice; he generally finds his way there."

"Then I will go back," said Brenda, with odd shyness, "and cross the meadows to it."

"Nonsense, darling; we can go this way in half the time."

"I would rather not," she said, shrinking back; "I need not trouble you."

"Brenda," he cried, really pained, "come with me, or, as you know, I shall turn with you, and you are choosing the longer way. Come."

She passed through the gate when he held it open, and then walked hurriedly to the bridge; but there she unconsciously slackened her steps, and he stopped, gently detaining her beside the low grey wall.

"Could you pass such a scene as this?" he said, looking first into her face, and then down at the silver ripple on the water. The river was deep now, and the moon shed its light down upon it, for the heavy clouds that every now and then obscured it, had, for this minute, passed away from its sweet, placid face.

"Yes, I want to find Andy, and I cannot waste my time."

"But he is so often missing, and yet always found again. I dare say he is at home by this time, or in the coppice, where we shall presently come upon him. Do not harass yourself about him, dear. Let us take these few moments of happiness; 'the holiest time,' you know, 'is the moonlight hour.' And, Brenda, darling, 'there never was moonlight so sweet as this.'"

"There is not much moonlight, Sir Wilfred; I wish there were, for the sake of my search."

"How dearly you love that brother of yours!" returned Sir Wilfred, laughing. "I should be jealous, I think, only that you give him a love so different from that which you give me."

"Yes," she answered, involuntarily.

"If it were not that I have learned to read this love in your face, I could not be content, for you never will confess it to me. Only that I know you so well, I should be mad with jealousy—simply, of course, of some terrible Frankenstein living only in my imagination; for you do not suppose that I could be really jealous of any other man winning the love that is all my own—only mine—entirely mine?"

"Please, please hush, Sir Wilfred!" cried Brenda, her sweet face pleading in the dim, varying light. "Why should we talk of these things together—we whose lives will be so far apart."

"Brenda!" His voice was full of anger as well as pain when he began to speak; but at that moment the moonlight showed him the face he loved, so close beside him, and he drew it to his heart, feeling, with passionate selfishness, that its beauty could belong to no one but himself; but feeling, too, with a passion void of selfishness, that it was his darling's least charm, after all.

"I cannot listen to these words of yours," he cried. "I could not bear the world without you, Brenda—I cannot bear myself without you. No one but you can shame away my selfishness; and only in your presence do I feel any power within me to be—what I know I ought to be."

"I think you will feel that power stronger," she answered, with great calmness, "when you and I are separated."

"You seem to enjoy frightening me, sweet," he said, trying to speak gaily; "but it is impossible to do so effectually. Your changeful, cruel moods have no more power to uproot, or even to disturb, my love, than they have to take from the beauty of this queenly little face."

"Sir Wilfred, will you just think of us as we really are?" she began, Miss Glenhore's words ringing in her heart. "My father is——"

"I have no present intention of marrying Mr. Yorke," remarked Sir Wilfred. "Why, dear me, Brenda, if our relations are to be considered in the question, what do you think

of marrying into the family of the lofty and formidable Clarissa?"

A little shudder ran through Brenda's frame, but she went on without faltering, as she again recalled Miss Glenhore's words—

"I am a low-born, uneducated girl, used all my life to hard, rough work, and the companionship of country labourers. Sir Wilfred, please don't laugh. You and I are——"

" 'She was a sad coquette,
He was a lover true,' "

hummed Sir Wilfred, laughing still. "That is what you and I are, as you are so anxious to have it understood. You have your lesson but imperfectly yet, you see, my darling child."

"Sir Wilfred," said Brenda, with low, heartfelt earnestness, "I shall never, after to-night, try to tell you this again. But oh! will you be pitiful enough to avoid what gives me such a bitter pain?"

"My child!" he cried, "how can this be? How can it pain you to hear me tell you of my true, unalterable love? Through all the years when I shall be your husband, Brenda, I shall be telling you this. Will it always pain you, dear one?"

Her hands were clasped in agony upon the stonework of the bridge, and her low voice sounded almost unfamiliar to him.

"If—if you did as you say—if—we married," she whispered, still echoing Miss Glenhore's cruel words, "you would repent it bitterly all your life. You may think you would not now, but you would; and the happiness that is only to be for a few months would be dearly, dearly paid for by the long, regretful years that would follow."

"Brenda," returned Sir Wilfred, in the low, suppressed tones which now and then gave evidence of the strong passions working in his indolent, happy nature, "has any one been speaking to you of—yourself and me?"

He did not see the frightened look in her eyes, nor the sudden blanching of her lips; he only knew that she answered in the soft, amused tone in which she so often parried his remarks—

"Yes, Sir Wilfred, some one has been speaking to me—of myself."

"Who?" he asked, anxious and uncertain whether she was jesting with him or not; "who, Brenda?"

"Mac."

"And what has he been saying?" inquired Sir Wilfred, too much relieved to resent the fact. "What dare he say to you?"

"He says," replied Brenda, relieved a hundred times more than he was, "that Highfield sadly wants a mistress."

"And he a slave, I suppose," added the baronet, savagely.

"Brenda, another home is sadly in want of a mistress, dear, and only one can ever fill that place. Vaughan can find other wives."

"He did not mention wanting more than one."

"Then he shall find his one elsewhere!" laughed Wilfred; "he is not going to have mine. There is to be no more work for these little hands; no more reproofs to sadden these sweet eyes. Darling, I shall give you all that will make you happy; no weariness and unsuitable duties."

"I never have them, Sir Wilfred," she answered, gently, but promptly. "I was born to my work, and my work fits me well."

"Not a bit, my sweet," he returned, laughing heartily now. "These little hands were never made, &c. You were born to be a little lady—a lady of title, too, if that adds any weight to the term. You were born to be the very light and life of one of 'the stately homes of England,' and the very joy and love and pride of a happy husband. In fact, my own, you were just born to be Lady Glenhore of Glen Court."

Then, though the moon had dipped behind the clouds again, her two hands went up rapidly, and covered her eyes.

"Listen," whispered Sir Wilfred, tenderly, "what little good there is in me, you have yourself inculcated; what happiness I can ever know, you only can give me. May I not give you what I offer, in return for that?"

"You will know a great deal of happiness, Sir Wilfred," she said, showing nothing of the effort her calmness cost her. "It is in your power to do so much, that you cannot fail to win great happiness in doing it. Almost everything seems in your power now."

"Everything?" he echoed. "Yet the one thing I desire you are trying to withhold. What power have I, if I lack the one gift that would be happiness? How can you say I can do many things, yet cannot win my love? What do you mean by saying that, Brenda?"

"Sir Wilfred," she answered, turning slowly from the low grey wall, "when I sent you back your gift this morning, I hoped that you would never speak to me again as—as you have done to-night. Please let me go now."

He walked on silently beside her. There was something in her voice which stayed his eager words, and so in this pained, waiting silence he walked on.

"To-morrow," he said to himself, "she will have forgotten this, and will let me win a smile, and take her to my heart once more."

The moon was hidden when they reached the coppice, and so, unable to see anything, they could only call Andy by name. They separated in their search, meeting again at the stile which led from the coppice into the fields.

"Who has been visiting at the farm to-night, Brenda?" asked Sir Wilfred. "What girl, I mean?"

"No one. Why?"

"Because I fancy a girl's figure passed me on the path, as I hunted among the trees. I spoke, but she did not answer. The lightness of the step makes me think it was a girl; the rustle of the dress assured me it was a woman."

"No girl would be here in the dark," replied Brenda, readily; "no girl would be in the Glen at all, I think. So yours was just such a fancy as mine, Sir Wilfred; for I actually fancied that Andy passed close to me just now, yet would not turn when I called him. As if it were at all likely!"

"I expect Andy is safely in bed. Shall we go and see, or shall we wait until the moon appears, and hunt the coppice again?"

"I will go home now. Good night, Sir Wilfred."

"Dear, I must see you safely there. Do you think I could leave you here, although the place is only fancy-haunted? I fired you three salutes from here this morning. Did you hear them?"

"No."

"I thought not. No sound from here reaches the farm; and yet it is not far, is it?"

"That is what father calls one of the odd features of the Glen. If you call ever so loudly in this coppice the sound is not heard at any distance towards home. Of course it is heard in the other direction."

"In one other direction only, dear. How fast you walk! I scarcely can keep up with you."

She laughed, still hastening on, until they reached the last gate, when she turned and said good night.

"My dearest," he whispered, lingering, "when will these partings of ours be over?" The moon was sailing on unclouded now, and he could not help reading her silence. "I will not come on for my gun to-night," he added, with a quick attempt at carelessness. "I will forget it, and remember it to-morrow. Good night." Then he turned and walked back through the meadows, while Brenda went swiftly on.

"Is Andy come?" she asked her father, who sat over the fire, smoking.

"Not unless he's gone to bed. I haven't seen him."

Brenda's heart seemed to stop beating. She ran upstairs and searched every room, and then, returning, she tremblingly unfastened the heavy bolt she had drawn at the front door, and looked out.

"Andy—Andy!" she called, her voice piercing the night; "Ar—dy!"

She went back again at last, and bending at the fire, lighted a

candle with shaking fingers. The wind from the open door blew it out; and she was just lighting it again, when her listening ears caught the sound of a quick step outside. She dropped the light, and ran out again "Andy!—Andy!" And this time—though no voice answered, and she could not see—the boy's slight figure pushed past her in the doorway. She seized him, and drawing him into the firelight, gazed into his face.

"My dear, my dear, what is the matter?"

He shook her off, looking back over his shoulder with a wild, scared glance; and when he was free from her gentle, detaining hands, he fled through the kitchen, and upstairs, and locked himself into his own room; leaving Brenda with that haunting vision of his terrified, hunted look.

CHAPTER IX.

A PRISONER.

It was late in the afternoon of the next day, but Andy had not come downstairs, nor even unlocked his door. Brenda, keeping his dinner warm for him, sorely against the wish of Miss Patience Kempe, went on busily with her work. Presently, for the twentieth time, she ran up and tried his door, whispering to him, again and again, to open it to her. She was creeping down again, dejected and disappointed at receiving no answer, when Patience ran against her on the stairs. The face of the housekeeper was red and frightened, and she seemed to be wringing her hands in her apron.

"We are all ruined!" she cried, in a sharp, rapid whisper. "Oh! Heaven above, we are all ruined!"

"What?" whispered Brenda, with a startling quietness, as she held the woman's fidgeting hands, and brought her face close to hers.

"We are ruined for ever—disgraced and ruined for ever!" she sobbed.

"How, Patience?" asked the girl, gripping the helpless hands more tightly, and unconsciously turning and glancing at her brother's closed door.

"I shall go away—I shan't stay to be disgraced too," went on Patience, catching her breath between each word. "They're waiting now."

"Let me pass," whispered Brenda—and now she never glanced at her brother's door—"let me pass."

"No, no!" cried Patience, detaining her; "they'll take you too, or something dreadful will happen. Stay with me, Brenda."

Let them take the boy to prison, and have done with it. They say they aren't going without him, so let him go peaceably. Oh, I wish your father was in! What shall I do?"

"Nothing," answered Brenda, her lips twitching. "Do not go near Andy."

"I must; I've promised to fetch him," replied Patience, shaking off her tears, and looking spitefully up at Andy's door. "I'll bring him down—the wicked, sinful little mur——"

Brenda's fingers were tight upon the woman's lips before the word was uttered, and her eyes were aflame with agony and passion.

"Go downstairs, Patience! I never made you obey me in my life before, but you shall obey me now. Go downstairs, and wait until my father tells you what you are to do."

Her abject terror made the woman at that moment submissive, and she went into the back kitchen with her apron to her eyes, muttering many a hard and spiteful word.

The two policemen, who waited in the chilly parlour, stood up as Brenda entered. They knew her well, and had often gazed in astonished and unheeded admiration at her beautiful face, when they had wandered from Forde to the church in the Glen. But now it seemed a strange face to them, and the nod which they had intended to give her was changed to a respectful bow.

Hardly knowing what she did, in her nervous bewilderment, she set two wine-glasses on the table, and bringing a bottle of sherry from the sideboard, filled them with an unsteady hand.

"I will light the fire," she said then, striking a match rapidly. "It is cold for you to be sitting here."

They begged her not to mind, that it was not cold, and that indeed there was no occasion for them to stay.

"You wish my brother to go with you?" she asked, leaning with one hand on the sideboard as she spoke to them.

"That is what we're waiting for, miss; when he's ready, we needn't trouble you longer."

"Who sent you for him?"

"Mr. Walton, the magistrate. He it was who was called in to hear the deposition."

"What deposition?"

The men wondered to hear the questions so steadily put, when they saw the shrinking of her whole attitude.

"The deposition of the young lady who was shot. She made it to-day."

"The young French lady?" Brenda asked, with no alteration in her voice.

"Yes. When she was carried from the coppice she was unconscious; but she got to remember it all, and then she sent for Mr. Walton."

"Who found her in the coppice?"

"Sir Wilfred Glenhore."

"Last night?"

"Yes, miss, last night. Please take care that you don't say anything to us which you mayn't like to repeat in Court."

"And Sir Wilfred carried her to Blarney—dying, as he thought?" she went on, steadily.

"Yes, miss, probably he thought so."

"And—I forget what I meant to ask."

"Sir Wilfred," added the man, pityingly, "though a magistrate, refused to hear any deposition, because he had found her, and because the gun with which she had been shot, and which lay near her, was his own. I believe Miss Power begged her not to make any deposition at all, but she would do so, and sent for Mr. Walton, who, of course, sent us here for"—glancing at the paper in his hand—"Andrew Yorke, who fired the gun with intent to murder."

"How does she know?"

"She saw him, Miss Yorke," answered the man, quietly. "It seems that they spoke to each other in the coppice, and he threatened her; then she saw him run away and return with the gun, which he deliberately fired at her—Green, bring some water; she's fainting."

"No, I need no water, thank you," said Brenda, trying to smile. "Did no one ask her why she was there—in the coppice—last night?"

"No, miss, that would hardly have been a legal question."

"They will ask my brother?"

"Yes, but that is a different thing."

"A different thing—yes, I suppose so," said Brenda, the deadly faintness creeping over her once more. "Whose gun did you say it was?"

"Sir Wilfred Glenhore's."

"And she saw who fired it?"

"Distinctly. The moonlight, you will recollect, was now and then very bright last night."

"I recollect."

"Please don't stay here," said one of the men, kindly. "This is all very hard for you."

Again she smiled, a wan, white smile, and spoke.

"I think some mistake has arisen. My brother has not the power, the strength, the—the wisdom for such a deed, even if he could wish to do it."

"He is but half-witted, I believe, miss; but I've known such, capable of planning and of doing a thing like this."

"Not Andy—not my brother!" she cried, eagerly. "He is an innocent, inoffensive boy; he always has been. I've seen him hesitate to hurt a spider—oh! often and often."

The men's eyes grew a little dim as they watched her, and while, in her quiet distress, she gently filled their glasses again, they turned away.

"You will not mind waiting a few minutes?" she asked. "I will be ready then."

Guessing her meaning, they hastened to tell her that they must take Andy alone to Bristol; and with just a quickening of her breath she spoke again,

"I will tell him you are here. I know he will not keep you waiting."

"Don't hurry him, please, miss; don't hurry him," they both said together. "We don't a bit mind the waiting."

Her hand was upon the door, and her back was to them. Their eyes—not quite dry now—were following her from the room, when she turned very slowly and asked another question.

"Did Sir Wilfred Glenhore tell Mr. Walton where he had left his gun?"

No, Sir Wilfred had declined to give any information at all.

"Did he say who he thought had committed the deed?"

No, he had not given an opinion at all on the subject. All they had gathered was, that he had been very anxious to prevent the prosecution, but that the French lady was determined.

"It would have been unlawful to keep it hidden, I suppose?" inquired Brenda, slowly.

Not exactly unlawful at that time, they told her. Before the deposition had been made before a magistrate, it might have been arranged among themselves. According to Sir Wilfred's wish, it might have been hushed up, but of course it was but natural that the French lady should choose to——

"Thank you," said Brenda, with dry lips, thanking the men more for the pause than the words. "Now I will call my brother."

The fire burned swiftly and clearly, and Brenda had left the wine upon the table, yet the two Forde policemen felt greatly relieved when they were told that Andy was ready, and that they were at liberty to go. They came out to the front door, where Brenda stood tying a comforter round her brother's neck, and looking the while into his scared white face, with all her heart in her eyes.

"Dear, dear," she whispered, "wherever you are, I shall come to you, and God will be with you. Kiss me once, dear. Your lips are cold and stiff, and do not answer to mine."

Closely and tightly she held him in her arms, crowding her warm, sweet kisses on his cheeks and lips. But he received them passively—almost unconsciously, it seemed—the haunted, terror-stricken look still flying across his face.

"Good-bye, my own little brother. I am coming presently.

Keep your great-coat on all the way, and your warm gloves. He is not very strong," she added, with shy eagerness looking up appealingly into the men's faces. "You see he is not very strong, and he takes cold so easily."

Once more, but this time silently, she took him in her arms and kissed him. Then, as he walked away, his slight young figure looking smaller than ever between the two men, she stood at the door watching them out of sight, still without a tear. Creeping quietly back to the great kitchen, Brenda went on with her work, never uttering a word. It was only when her father, who sat moodily beside the fire, spoke to her at last of Andy, that she turned and answered with a flash of scorn in her great, sad eyes—

"I sent for you in, because I thought you would help or cheer him, father. As you did not care to do either, please don't talk about him."

"What could I do, child?" he inquired, peevishly. "I think I did best to keep quiet. A nice disgrace he has brought upon us! I can never hold up my head again. When things were going on so well too!"

"Your head need not be bowed for Andy's sin, father," said Brenda, softly, "until you hear that it was done sinfully. I think he could not know what he was doing."

"Oh! it's all very well to say so, but they'll maybe prove something else at the trial. And who will look at us after this?"

"We can go away," she whispered.

"And leave the farm!" he cried, angrily, "now when everything has been done for me that can be done!" His voice suddenly sank to a whisper. "Brenda, what shall we do about Sir Wilfred?"

"Nothing, father."

"You saw him leave his gun here, you know?"

"Yes, I saw him."

"I believe, child, that he'll never come here again."

Before Brenda could answer, Patience entered the room, so much relieved by the departure of the policemen, that all her bad tempers were having their own way.

"Of course Brenda saw the gun left," she said; "she'd let anything dangerous be left here, just to please Sir—" Patience corrected herself, knowing that the words she had been going to say would have angered her master—"just to please herself. Just because she wanted him to come again for it—she didn't heed the danger there was to all of us. I lay the whole thing on her, entirely."

"Be quiet, Patience," interrupted Mr. Yorke. "It had nothing to do with Brenda. Don't you think it's as bad a thing for her as for us? You must explain how you regret it, as soon as

ever you see Sir Wilfred," he added, turning to his daughter; "and remember, I'll pay any money within reason to get the boy quietly off; and then we'll have him taken care of where he can't do any more mischief—remember this. As for his ever coming here again, I'll see that *that* doesn't happen."

Through the open door, down the garden, and out into the fields, ran Brenda. She felt that she should shriek aloud if she listened longer. And there in the evening quietness she laid her head upon the grass, and sobbed as if her heart were breaking. A firm, swift step upon the meadow path, and Malcolm Vaughan was standing over her. She did not see him, and he stood silent a long time, his face full of pain and sympathy. Then he stooped, and gently touched her hair.

"Brenda, my child," he whispered, "Brenda, dear heart, look up and tell me of our poor boy."

The deep sobs ceased, the hot hands pushed back the tangled hair, and the thirsting eyes looked up at Malcolm, as if at last they had found something they could rest upon. Slowly Brenda told him everything, feeling relieved herself as she talked; and he listened with a sympathy which she could plainly read.

"I shall go into Bristol for the examination," he said, in an unembarrassed, easy tone, which in itself alone unconsciously cheered her. "Will you come too?"

"Oh! Mac, of course I am going—I shall be there ready for Andy."

"Then shall we go together?"

"No, Mac," answered Brenda, gently, "don't you trouble about me. I have been before with Andy, you know, and I shall lodge where I lodged then. You remember our going for a physician's advice for him?"

"I remember, dear; but that does not make me listen to your plan of going alone now."

"You have heard all, then, Mac?" she asked, after a long, thoughtful pause.

"Yes. I happened to hear all about it last night," he answered readily, with no mystery or astonishment in his voice. "It seems that Sir Wilfred Glenhore declines to enter into any explanation about his gun, beyond the fact that he used it yesterday. Even if it comes to a trial, Brenda, I feel confident he will answer nothing, because his sympathy is all with you. But Mr. Walton suspects nothing of this; he feels sure that if Sir Wilfred tells nothing, there must be nothing to tell. Sir Wilfred has just that sort of confident manner, and gay assurance in what he himself says, which takes by storm a practical, plodding, self-doubting man like Mr. Walton; and the consequence is that the magistrate hangs on every word of the baronet's; and when no words are forthcoming, doubts and hesitates about his own."

"Will there be a—a trial, Mac?"

"I think there must be," he answered gently, "as Miss Gartret has prosecuted. Her account of the affair was given with most unnatural vehemence, they say. But, Brenda, dear heart, I believe it will all end well. Try to believe so too. If you do not, how can you comfort Andy when you see him? Come, it is too late for you to be sitting here."

They walked together to the house, and his loving, pitiful words comforted her inexpressibly.

"I am coming in, Brenda," he said, though he hesitated at the door; "I am coming in to speak to Mr. Yorke." And she thanked him with her eyes.

The fire was burning cheerfully in the parlour, and she led him that way. But at the door she started back, for the lamp was lighted, and beside the table sat Gertrude Power, her elbow resting on it, and her face half hidden in her hand.

"I will go round," whispered Malcolm; but at the sound of his voice, Miss Power rose and turned.

In the inelegant room, whose only richness was the caressing firelight, the two girls stood looking into each other's faces. There was no jealousy in either glance, no envy in either heart. Brenda looked at the wife who had been chosen for the man she loved, and thought how worthy this wife would be of him. And Gertie looked on the peasant-girl whom she knew he loved, and thought only how wondrously beautiful she was.

"Is your brother gone, Miss Yorke?" asked Gertrude, holding out her hand, and knowing it was kinder to begin to speak of him at once.

"Yes, Miss Power; he went a few hours ago."

"And you?"

"I am going to him early in the morning—as early as I may."

"I am very glad," said Gertie, kindly. "You will cheer him, and be happier with him. But I hope you will not fear or fret. I feel quite sure he will be acquitted. You must know that Sir Wilfred Glenhore will never rest until the boy is free."

"He cannot prove him innocent, unless he is so, Miss Power," said Brenda, in a low tone. "I would rather he did not try."

"Brenda," said Gertie, calling her so in her intense pity, and speaking very gently, "you know you do not mean this; you know that you would be surprised if Sir Wilfred did not do all he could for the boy of whom he always thinks most kindly. You know quite well that you could not recognise him, if he were cold and indifferent about this."

Brenda turned to her, grateful for the indescribable sympathy her words and voice expressed, yet all the sadder, as it seemed, for hearing them.

"Will you ask Sir Wilfred Glenhore," she began, humbly and

very earnestly, "will you ask him not to hesitate in telling the truth? It is known that the gun is his; it must be known that it was left here with us—left loaded in this house—before dark yesterday. Will you tell him, please?"

"No, I cannot attempt to guide Sir Wilfred," answered Miss Power, seriously. "He will act as he thinks well in this, Brenda. He is going to Bristol himself to-morrow; and, though I fancy I shall see him before he goes, I cannot tell him this. Brenda, I feel with him that—that others are to blame even more than the poor boy himself. We all know that he cannot have properly understood the gun; Louise must know this herself. Her declaration that he pointed the gun at her, and pulled the trigger slowly and deliberately, will have but little weight, I—trust. I entreated her to let the matter pass; or, at any rate, to make no public declaration until she was better, and could think over it calmly. I entreated her with prayers and tears, Brenda, but she would not listen; she would have Mr. Walton sent for. I would not let our servants go; but that was of no use, because Miss Glenhore sent—not a servant of Sir Wilfred's; she dared not have done it—but her own maid. I think she was as eager for the prosecution as Miss Gartret was. I cannot understand their motive. I cannot understand how Louise can be so cruel."

"Is she very ill?" asked Brenda, timidly.

"Decidedly getting better every hour."

"She will recover?" the girl asked, breathlessly.

"Yes," replied Miss Power, with a reassuring smile; "I have no doubt of a recovery, though not a speedy one."

"Thank Heaven!"

In utter and intense weariness, evident even in spite of the relief Miss Power's words had given her, Brenda pressed her two hands upon her forehead, and pushed the thick, soft hair from her temples.

"Brenda," said Gertie, with anxious tenderness, "tell me, can I do anything for you?"

"You can indeed, Miss Power," said Brenda, wistfully; "you can do that one thing which I asked you first."

"No, I cannot do that; you must ask Sir Wilfred that yourself, Brenda."

"No, no!" replied Brenda, breathlessly, "I cannot. What am I to Sir Wilfred Glenhore?"

"Then I will ask him," rejoined Miss Power, frightened a little at the girl's passionate earnestness. "I will indeed. And what else can I do for you—for yourself? You are not going alone to-morrow?"

"No. Mr. Vaughan is going, and I shall travel with him."

"Mr. Vaughan is here now, is he not? I should like to see him before I go—and indeed I must go now, Brenda. I have

a servant waiting for me outside, and he will think I am lost."

It was a pleasant little smile, though a swift one, with which she spoke; and Brenda opened the door and led her across the hall into the kitchen. Here Miss Power stood a few minutes talking to Mr. Yorke, occasionally glancing rather searchingly into Malcolm's face. Even for Patience she had a few pleasant words, and when she left the room again with Brenda, Malcolm followed them to open the front door.

"Are you quite sure, Brenda," asked Miss Power again, earnestly, as they stood upon the threshold, "that I can do nothing for you—for yourself?"

"Thank you," she answered gratefully, "but Mr. Vaughan will help me all I need."

Miss Power noticed the trustful glance she gave him, and how he drew his hand across his eyes as he met it; and she spoke again hurriedly.

"Sir Wilfred Glenhore will be in Bristol himself, and so I have faith in all being well for you, and for your brother. Good-bye—good-bye."

Malcolm went with her to where the man-servant was waiting, and they spoke together quietly and earnestly for those few minutes.

Brenda was still upon the steps when he returned, and he stood beside her, waiting for her to break her thoughtful silence. It was many minutes before she did so, and he anxiously and gently laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"Mac," she whispered, slowly, raising her face to his, "I've tried lately not to be so selfish—oh, I have, indeed!—and yet *this* has come!"

"Hush, dear heart!" he murmured, brokenly. "You were never selfish. You never could be."

"Yes, I am, Mac. Patience always says so, and it is true; is this the punishment?"

The child-like eyes were seeking his, in utter reliance on his answer, and the lips were parted breathlessly. For a moment he bent towards them in the dim light, his face full of unutterable love and longing—lower and lower, until her warm breath touched him. One moment, and in the quiet evening stillness he might clasp her to his heart as he had sometimes dreamed of doing, and kiss her in their first and last long kiss—a kiss the memory of which should last through all his lonely life, because she was, and ever would be, his only love. His lips were close to her; the innocent face waited, upraised, for his word of comfort. Swiftly he read it; then his brave and patient lips drew back, and whispered only courageous words, in which there rang a love that knew no selfishness.

CHAPTER X.

"BOUGHT WITH A PRICE."

It was the evening of the next day, and Brenda sat alone in a little sitting-room in Bristol, where Malcolm had left her, to stay until Andy's examination was over, and where he had said he would rejoin her when everything was decided. Yet he came again quite early on this same evening; and he sat down quietly beside her at the window, talking of the strangeness of the streets, and of the difference between his own feelings here in the town, and in his farm on the borders of the Glen. Thus for an hour he cheered and comforted her, until she almost forgot her sorrow in his homely and familiar presence; and when he rose, she wondered that so long a time had passed.

"It will soon be to-morrow night," he said, in his comforting tones, "and the anxiety will be over. Now, good-bye. You will be brave and hopeful, as you always are, dear heart."

He stayed below and ordered her tea, waiting to see them carry up as dainty and tempting a meal as could be prepared; then he went out into the unfamiliar streets, seeking among the passers-by for one whom he would have known quickly, even among the hundreds whom he met. Earnestly and indefatigably he sought Sir Wilfred, never dreaming what a generous search it was, and how free from suspicion and mistrust.

Brenda's tea had been taken down almost untouched, in spite of the care with which it had been prepared; and she was sitting at the window looking down upon the lighted street, when a step that was dear and familiar to her, ascended the straight staircase, and stopped at her own door. She turned eagerly, and though she knew that of all in the world, she ought last to have chosen to see Sir Wilfred now, yet tears of involuntary and untold joy started into her eyes as he came in. His face was grave and sad, yet its gravity and sadness deepened fast, as he came forward in the twilight and greeted her.

Through these silent hours which Brenda had spent alone, she had been living over again that bitter day which seemed now so far away. Every word and look connected with it, she had recalled with sharp, keen misery. The quiet meeting in the churchyard, when she had stood beside Sir Wilfred, and felt no shame even in reproving him for his idle life, never imagining how soon the heavy shadow of crime would lie upon her own. She recalled the bright and confident tone in which he had once more told her of his unswerving love, and the quiet strength with which she had been able to reject it, thinking only of his good, and of some one else who loved him; and knowing no-

thing of the scornful words which were to be spoken to her later on that day: not knowing—thank Heaven, not knowing then!—that it would sully his pure name to have hers allied with it. Without the knowledge of a crime to part them, without even the knowledge of the contempt in which the thought of her was held by others of his name, she had had strength and courage to give him back the love which had been the light and glory of her life. That thought was Brenda's one faint gleam of comfort, and when she recalled that evening's agony, she did not acknowledge, even to herself, which had been its deepest and sorest pain.

The joy which had shone in her eyes as they met Sir Wilfred's, faded very rapidly; and then he saw a great sorrow take its place.

"Darling," he said, looking down into her eyes, and speaking as even *she* had never heard him speak before, "do you look hurt to see me? In your grief or in your happiness, who ought to come to you so soon as I?"

Dreading that her own eyes might answer his impassioned gaze, Brenda covered them with her fingers; then he laid his hand upon her shoulder very gently.

"In my grief and in my happiness, Brenda, I seek you always; look up and comfort me, for I am sadly troubled now."

He had guessed that that appeal would move her; but though he could hear her breath quicken, and see her fingers tremble, she did not, even then, uncover her eyes to look up at him, as he wished.

"Brenda," he went on, brokenly, "you have it in your power to pain me with a pain unutterable—me whom you—have loved. Can you bear to do it?"

And still there was no answer.

"Look up. One glance will be enough. My love, this is a cruel deed of yours."

"Oh! is there nothing that will make it easier?" thought Brenda, in her silent pain. "Every word he utters makes the struggle harder."

"Brenda," he whispered, "if I loved you even a hundred times less than I do, I could not give you the misery you give me."

Still she was silent, and the warm loving eyes, saddened by unspeakable longing, were hidden from him.

"You need not speak to me, my dearest," he pleaded, more and more earnestly, "only look up, that I may read your answer in your eyes. I will rest satisfied without one word of love—yet. I will wait for that. I only ask you to take all mine, and to tell me when you will let me give it to you in the face of all the world. Oh! Brenda, do not leave me to understand you so cruelly. Look up into my face, for I will not believe what you are trying to make me feel."

Slowly she dropped her hand at last, and then he saw the desolate look that had crept into her eyes.

"Only once, Sir Wilfred," she cried, and in her low voice was a misery which went straight to his heart. "When I have said it to-night, let it be said for ever and ever. I shall never be able to speak one word to you as you wish, in all my life. Any such words you say to me, must be unanswered now and ever. You know—you *know* I have never said I loved you. You said you could not give me misery—oh, please remember that, and spare me now!"

"How can I," he exclaimed, passionately, "when I love you so entirely—so madly?"

"Yes—so—madly," she echoed, with an odd dreariness in her voice. "Your love is just a—madness, Sir Wilfred."

"I will not—I cannot hear you speak of it so," he answered, angrily. "It is a love most true and fervent; a love that would take you into its warmth, and shelter you from every breath of sorrow or anxiety. Come, Brenda."

His voice had melted from its anger to infinite tenderness, but she shrank from him.

"I can never give you another answer," she said. "I can never, never listen to your words again."

"Because,"—the question forced itself through his tight lips slowly,—"because—you do not love me?"

No answer, save that stillness on her white face.

"It cannot be!" he cried, vehemently. "It cannot! Brenda, look at me."

But though the quick authoritative tones startled her, neither eyes nor lips stirred.

"I have asked you a question, Brenda, must I take your silence for an answer? If you do love me—only a little, my dearest—look for one moment up into my eyes."

There was a weary little pause, and then Sir Wilfred turned away, a heavy, speechless sorrow on his face. Leaning his arms upon the table, he buried his face upon them, and so in silence the minutes crept by, while the gloom deepened within the room.

"Sir Wilfred," whispered Brenda at last, coming nearer to him, and standing very still beside the table. "I thought, when I sent you back your gifts, that you would have understood, without these words of mine, which have been so hard. If I knew it to be useless for you to ask me for my love then, how much more useless is it now!"

"Was it in real earnestness that you sent those back to me?"

"Yes." And as she thought of the beautiful present of which she had been so proud, and which, two days before, she had addressed to him, with hot tears falling on her hands, the tears again gathered.

"You will keep nothing of mine," he said bitterly, as he raised his head, "neither my love nor my gifts?"

"No," she answered, quietly. "and you will soon be very, very glad, for I think, Sir Wilfred, if it had been that I had loved you, it would have been a most unhappy thing for you."

"Hush, Brenda!"

But in the strength of her pure and simple love, she went on steadily—

"Even three days ago you would have done unwisely to—love, —no, I will say what I meant to say—to wed me. I have lived another sort of life from yours; I have other friends, who could not be your friends. What would the Glenhores have said to you, Sir Wilfred, for bringing such a wife among them?"

"They would have said, my darling," replied Sir Wilfred, with sudden hope, "that she was as different from those they would have had me choose from, as the sunlight is from sickly gaslight,—not in her beauty merely, but in the pure and true nobility of every act and word. This they must have said when they had known you, my sweet. They would have said——"

"They would have said," she interrupted, bravely still, "that you had never looked to find the good in others—and that would have been true. They would have said that you had connected yourself with those whom they could never acknowledge, and they would have called you mad, for marrying the sister of—an—idiot; and *that* would have been true."

The voice was breaking now, and Sir Wilfred started up.

"They dared not say it, Brenda; no Glenhore among them all dare call my choice in question. I am the head of the house, my darling. What are their opinions to me?"

"They would have said that—three days ago," she went on, taking no heed of his exclamation. "Now they would say you had disgraced them all, and stained your honoured name, by bringing into their family the sister of a—murderer."

Then, when the sharpest struggle of all had been made for his sake, the brave voice broke quite down, and Sir Wilfred, with a quiet gentleness, took her hand in his.

"Tell me, Brenda—just one word, sweetheart,—is this your only reason?"

"Oh no—no!" she answered, quickly.

"You are sure?" he asked again, and very slowly.

"Quite—quite sure."

A long pause. Then, with a change of tone which she understood, and which told that hope was dying within him, he promised her, very quietly and rather sternly, that Andy should be free and happy again. But, presently, the old longing made another struggle, faintly and hopelessly.

"If you would give me your happiness to care for, Brenda, Andy shall be doubly happy."

"I will try all I can to make him happy," she said absently; "he will be with me."

"Always that, if you like, Brenda,—and with me too."

She looked up, suddenly comprehending all that he meant, her heart leaping at his noble words. The poor idiot boy, who must ever bear about with him, even if free, the taint of this savage deed—the boy whom even his own father had refused to see again—the boy who could never be anything but a trouble and anxiety—Sir Wilfred was promising to guard and keep with him! Her strength broke down at this, as it had never broken before, and her head fell upon her hands, quick sobs shaking her frame.

"Darling," Sir Wilfred whispered, feeling that this grief was for her brother, "Andy shall be cleared; I will not rest until he is cleared."

He promised this again and again, and still she did not cease her sobbing. It was only when at last he spoke, to comfort her, of the expected leniency of the magistrates, that she grew calm, and could look up, speaking slowly.

"Sir Wilfred, will you tell them that you left that gun with us?"

"Never!"

"Then I must do it; not to-morrow, but at the trial."

"You shall not come near us," he answered, with great determination, "you shall not come into the court at all, my beautiful child; I will not have it so."

"You cannot prevent me," she answered, smiling faintly. "I will let it be known that I have evidence to give, and then I shall be obliged to be there."

"Hush, do not think of this. I could not bear to see you there—you, whose life should have been so sweet and smooth. And, Brenda," he added, rising to go when he noticed how tired she looked, "when shall you go home? I do not like to think of you here, though I am staying myself. For the first time in my life I do not want you near me."

"I must stay near Andy," she answered, quickly; "always, always near Andy."

"But if——"

"Whatever the end may be," she interrupted, eagerly, "I must stay always near Andy."

"Brenda, how will his father receive him?"

She wavered a little at the question, and could not tell him of her father's decision.

"Andy and I shall always be together," she said, rather hesitatingly; and watching him as she spoke, she saw a shadow fall upon his face. "Oh, Sir Wilfred," she cried, in sudden fear,

"surely they will let us be together—in any case. Mr. Vaughan said perhaps they would not punish him, but only have him confined!—only have him confined! my poor boy who has been so free and innocent all his life! Oh! if they want him taken care of, who could do it as I will?"

"No one," said Sir Wilfred, gently. "Your care is all that he needs, my child."

"And do you think they will allow me to do this—do you, Sir Wilfred?"

He smiled to reassure her, but she saw the doubt behind the smile.

"Brenda," he said, breaking their short silence, "how is it that you have uttered no word of blame against the girl who so wickedly provoked and maddened him? I witnessed its first occurrence, and I have heard of its repetition, both at Blarney and in the coppice, the night before last—at least, I have heard enough to understand it; and I feel——"

"Surely, surely," whispered Brenda, in quick interruption, "surely, whatever the verdict may be, in the eyes of a tender, pitying Father, the poor young darkened spirit will not be condemned?"

"We will leave it in His hand," Sir Wilfred answered softly, his sad eyes resting on her face.

"Good-bye, my own beloved," he whispered. "Next time I look into the eyes I love, this trouble will have left them, I trust, for ever. Even at this most bitter moment, Brenda, it almost comforts me to know that you do not feel the one terrible suffering which tears my heart—such suffering as only a man, I think, could bear. Good-bye, my dear, dear love!"

And then he kissed her with a sad and simple tenderness, and left her alone once more.

CHAPTER XL

ALONE.

"SUCH suffering as only a man, he thought, could bear."

Brenda repeated the words to herself, over and over, her brows drawn, and her hands clenched in agony.

"He loved me through it all!" she cried, in her solitude. "He would have held me to his heart even now; in sight of all the world, and with this shadow on my name. God bless him ever for the dear words he said—the words which have made me brave because *he* was so brave. Oh, thank Heaven that in their bravery they made me brave; and that my heart did not break, for—Andy wants me."

A faint, sweet smile broke over the white face, as she thought how he, of all the world, most wanted her.

The unheeded fire was burning low and dim, when some one brought her in a letter. She took it with eager fingers, and read it as she sat crouching before the fire, cold and lonely. It was in Malcolm Vaughan's large, clear writing, and yet it was not easy to her to read it:—

“MY DEAR BRENDA,—I have been with Andy, and he is well and comfortable. He asked for you many times, and hardly said anything besides. I do not wonder at his silence though, poor little fellow, as I can see plainly how bewildered he feels, and I fancy there is sorrow and repentance too. I am very hopeful about to-morrow. I think it may all end well for us, though I do not know how. Keep hope and courage, Brenda, dear heart; there are only a few hours more to wait in uncertainty. I will come to you as soon as the examination is over—not before; but I will be with Andy all I can. I have heard many particulars of that night discussed here, which I had not heard before, and I feel only more and more sure that Andy is not the one most to blame.

“Still, dear, you must not build too much on that; the verdict is in the hands of men who know no extenuating circumstances, and you must not hope too much, lest the disappointment be too hard to bear. I think that the French lady almost, if not quite, deserved the fate she met with—yes, if only for the suspicious curiosity which prompted her to follow Sir Wilfred towards Glen Farm that night, after he had left her at Blarney.

“What could be her motive, Brenda? Did she suspect that it was his design to meet you, as, by pure and simple chance, he did?—and did she wish to have that meeting to tell of? If so, I feel sure it would have been to Miss Glenhore she would have told it, for, little as I know of Miss Power, I cannot fancy her listening. Sir Wilfred, I am certain, understands this motive, whatever it may have been; but, however much it may be in his power to disclose if he will, he neither has disclosed, nor, I fancy, will disclose anything. I believe his aunt is a firm ally of Miss Gartret's, and I think, dear, that each is worthy of the other. What do you say? We Glen folk do not worship Miss Glenhore, as you know, though you would never allow a word against her.

“I am very sorry for Miss Power, who has tried so unsuccessfully to prevent Miss Gartret's carrying out her determination of prosecuting Andy—such an unnatural prosecution from her sick-bed! Altogether, I cannot quite understand it; but perhaps I have not heard very correctly. I did chance to see Sir Wilfred Glenhore himself, but it was not he who told me anything of this.

"Good night, my dear. I asked Andy if he sent you a kiss, and he gave me one of his most energetic nods. You will think him looking pale, I dare say, but you must remember how quickly anything tells upon him, and what a terrifying lesson this has been.

"Ever, dear Brenda, yours,

"M. V."

And this was Mac's letter; and Brenda—though she never guessed how anxiously he had written it, carefully wording it, to sound unanxious and to save her pain, yet not to feed her with too sure a hope—held it tightly in her hand as she read, feeling its genial, gentle words a wondrous comfort.

Hour after hour, as the night wore on, Brenda sat there upon the rug, her head bent on a chair, her wide eyes fixed upon the fire. Andy himself could not have been as pale as she was, when she rose at last, long after all the house was still and sleeping, and crept to her own chilly room. Setting her candle on the table, she glanced a moment into the glass—only a moment—and then turned away, shuddering.

"Such an hour as that, we can but bear once in all our lives," she murmured, "and it is over. The pang may not last for ever, but such a night as this could never come again."

She was standing now at the window, looking out upon the deserted street, and her words were low and broken.

"Such suffering as only a man, he thought, could bear—only a man, he said; so he will never guess how I have suffered too—that is one thought of comfort to me. Oh, if Andy comes back to me," she whispered, raising her folded hands in unconscious pleading, "he and I will try with all our hearts to make our lives different, and to keep for ever in our memory the Mercy that will have set him free. Mine shall not be a gloomy and a disappointed life, nor will my boy's be sin-shadowed any more. To love and care for him will be a great, great joy for me—quite enough joy—quite enough—if he comes back to me."

CHAPTER XII.

"GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY?"

It was the evening of Brenda's second day in Bristol, and she sat alone, waiting for tidings; her heart beating so quickly and loudly that she pressed her hand upon it, trying to be calm and patient. She heard every footstep in the street, as distinctly as if it had been upon the stairs, and, as each one neared the door,

the eagerness with which she followed it grew to absolute pain. One after another they passed on, and as they did so, the watchful eyes clouded; though only to grow more brightly eager as the next came on.

A distant clock was striking, and Brenda, unconsciously glad to have any sound to listen to that was not a passing step, raised her head, and counted each slow, deliberate stroke—

One—two—three—

She knew there was another stroke to follow, because she had counted every hour through that day; but at that third one she stopped, for her quick ears had detected another sound, and her heart recognised it instantly. She tried to turn the handle of the door, but her trembling fingers failed. A slow, awkward hand opened it from without, and in one minute she had her little brother tightly clasped within her loving arms.

"Oh, Andy! Oh, my dear—my dear!"

It was all she could say, as she covered his small, thin lips with eager kisses; and he looked up half bewildered, asking her to take him home.

"Yes, dear," she said, drawing a chair close to the fire for him, and taking up the tea-pot, which she had been keeping warm, with the hope—though only a very faint one—of his coming to have the meal with her; "yes, dear, we will go home directly. Aren't we snug here, though? Aren't you glad tea was ready? It is so pleasant and comfortable to have tea. These chops have kept beautifully warm before the fire. Don't they look nice? Come, you ought to be so hungry, because you didn't get a proper dinner; and this is just the time you have tea at home, you know, even after you've had a good dinner. Oh, Andy, I am so happy now!"

"Why?" he asked, looking wonderingly at her.

"Because you are come back to me, my pet—because I have my own little brother back again." And there rang a perfect hymn of gratitude in her glad, loving voice.

"Shall I ever be there—in that—crowd again, Sis?" questioned the boy, in a low, awed whisper.

"Andy, could you ever, ever do such a wrong thing again?" she asked, kneeling before him, with her hands on his.

"No."

The word was a strange mixture of alarm and fearlessness.

"Then you will never be there again; you will never go away from me again, dear? Oh, Andy, I want you to say something with me."

And with his eyes upon her lips, he whispered, after her, the simple words of penitence and thankfulness.

Then she poured out his tea, and carried it to him, stirring it and tasting it, as if she could not linger too long beside him;

then she cut his chop daintily for him, and afterwards spread honey on his bread, actually laughing aloud when she saw him eat and enjoy it.

"Andy," she asked, as she at last took her seat, and looked at him wistfully, while she stirred her own untasted tea, "how did you find me?"

"I didn't find you," he answered, slowly; "Sir Wilfred did."

"Did he bring you here, dear?"

"Yes, to the stairs; and then I came up by myself."

"What did he tell you, Andy?" she asked, the colour rising in her cheeks.

"He said I was to go to you. Why do we have tea here?"

"We must stay here to-night, my pet," she answered, her eyes following his as they wandered round the unfamiliar walls; "to-morrow we will go home. Andy, can you tell me anything about it? What did they say to you?"

But here the boy began to cry with such piteous helplessness, that Brenda started up, blaming herself hotly in her thoughts, and kissing and soothing him with gay, bright tenderness.

"I think," said Andy, presently, with vague recollection, "Sir Wilfred got them away. He said they wouldn't come for me again. He's coming here soon, but they aren't."

Seeing how timidly he looked around as he spoke, and how rapidly his cheeks flushed and paled, she began to talk of other things—of his pet rabbit at home, of his picture-books, and his garden; and at last, when the tray had been carried away, she drew him to her by the fire, and told him one of the long quaint stories which he loved to hear from her.

She finished slowly, lingering over the end, as she generally did, that she might lengthen for him to the uttermost this pleasure which it was in her power to give. Then, as her words ceased, she looked down into the little white face that was turned to the fire, and saw that he had fallen asleep. She touched the tired eyelids with her lips, glad that he was at rest at last; then tenderly laid his head upon her knees, and sat before the fire motionless, one light, soft hand upon his scattered hair. And presently, as she held the sleeping child, she heard another step upon the stairs, and Sir Wilfred Glenhore came slowly into the little room.

"Will you excuse me if I do not move, Sir Wilfred?" Brenda asked, shyly. "Andy is asleep, and I think the sleep will do him good."

"Happy little lad!" said Sir Wilfred, as he drew his own seat to the fire beside her. "Neither you nor I would wake him from his peaceful sleep, nor rouse him from his restful attitude."

She noticed that Sir Wilfred's eyes—so deep and grave to-day—wandered from Andy's sleeping face to the fire, avoiding hers.

She noticed that his hands had not their old look of strength and ease, but were nervous and restless ; and she noticed that his voice to-day had none of its old happy confident tone, but was grave and patient. And as she listened to it, and looked into his down-bent face, she was conscious that he was passing through the greatest sorrow he could ever know, and she felt that, while he passed through it, he was suffering in every kind and quiet word he uttered to her ; doubly suffering, while the words were so different from the confident, resistless words of old.

"Sir Wilfred," she said, quietly, "if I tried to thank you for what you have done to-day, I never could do it as—as I should like."

"It was very little ; you hardly know how little," he answered, quickly.

"Little ?" she echoed. "Little to give me back my brother ? Little to give him back his freedom ?"

"It has not been that, my—child."

"Oh, yes, it has !" she cried, not understanding him. "And how can I ever thank you ?"

"If I told you how, you would not thank me so, Brenda," he said, sadly ; "so do not thank me at all. Give me the words I long for, or—spare me all you can. But I was going to ask you," he added, with a sudden change of tone after her silent pause, "where will Andy go ?"

"Home," she answered, turning in astonishment at his question.

"I think he had better not."

"Oh, yes, we must, Sir Wilfred ; Andy and I. Why should we not ?"

"Will you not let Andy go with Vaughan ? It would be better."

"Oh ! no, please," she cried, entreatingly. "See how delicate he looks ! I cannot bear him to leave me. Please let us go together."

"My child, I have no wish to separate you. Do not plead with me ; I am not master of myself enough for that just yet. My wound is wide and aching still." Again he corrected himself suddenly. "You will go with him then, Brenda, away from Bristol to-morrow, as early as you can ?"

"Yes ; home, Sir Wilfred."

"Would you not rather take him away—for a time ?"

"He would rather go home. Please let us go home, Sir Wilfred."

A look of pain crossed his face as she again pleaded, though his eyes were turned from her.

"Then listen, Brenda," he said, slowly. "Leave here by the morning train to-morrow. Vaughan is going with you, and he

will take all trouble from you on the way. Do not stop to take your tickets, or for anything. Leave it all to him. I will order a cab to be here in time, and you will take Andy in it. Even for that little time I do not like you two to go alone ; but it would be unwise for me to take—Andy, and Vaughan will be waiting to meet the cab."

"I travelled to and from Bristol alone with Andy, a year ago."

"Whoever let you do it, was guilty of a deeper wrong than carelessness," he answered, as he looked from the boy's evident and painful helplessness to the girl's young dazzling beauty. "I did not know you then."

"No, Sir Wilfred, I had never seen you."

And then she wondered a little at the calmness of her own words, while such a flood of thought swept over her sad heart.

"You will be ready?" he asked, presently. "And I will see you again—at home."

"Oh! Sir Wilfred," she cried, with sudden recollection, "suppose father will not see him—though he is freed?"

"I have spoken to Mr. Yorke since you have been here, Brenda," he returned, knowing that she could never guess how he had been preparing her father for Andy's return, "and I know he will be ready to receive his son. As I said, I will see you at home. All will be bright and well for you at last. And now good-bye—my beautiful, patient child, good-bye."

CHAPTER XIII.

BRENDA'S DISCOVERY.

MR. YORKE received his son even more willingly than Brenda had dared to hope ; and Malcolm stayed with them that evening after the journey, and was so kind to Andy that she began to feel as if she were returning to the old innocent, happy life. But in a few days her thoughts changed. The bitter innuendoes which Patience occasionally let fall, stung the girl keenly ; and Malcolm Vaughan—though he came to the farm continually—seemed so pitiful and sympathetic towards her, as well as towards Andy, and had so few encouraging words to say, that her heart began to sink, though she could hardly have told why.

"You are so quiet always when you come, Mac," she said at last, "that it seems as if you were sorry for us all. Of course," she added, quickly, "you are sorry when you think of the past ; but why are you not glad that Andy is acknowledged innocent?"

"Andy begins to look himself again, does he not?" Malcolm

asked, his eyes straying away from Brenda's face. "No one dear heart, can be more glad to see him so than I."

"He will never forget this time; I think the memory of it haunts him, waking and sleeping."

"Perhaps even *that* is well," mused Malcolm; "but—do you not think it would be wise for you both to go away for a time, Brenda?"

"Oh! no" she smiled; "he is happier here than anywhere; he knows every nook and corner of the place. No, Mac, he is happier here."

"I think you are wrong, dear. Do you not notice what fear he has of every man he meets, and how timidly he looks behind him every now and then, almost as if he fancied himself called or pursued?"

"Yes, I have noticed that," she answered sadly; "but I think time will cure it."

"And you think it best to keep him here?"

"Yes, Mac. I think it odd of you and Sir Wilfred to wish to have him sent away."

"Very well."

And when he was gone, Brenda wondered why, with all his kindness, he was not kind enough to show how pleased he was about her brother's acquittal.

"He is cold," she thought, "and stern, in spite of all his thoughtfulness for us—not as he used to be. He used to come and make us all comfortable, and be so kind to Andy and—me. Now he only comes just to get the newspaper—before my father has read it too—and he hardly speaks to any of us. I should never have thought that Malcolm would have changed to us."

Brenda had been home a week before Sir Wilfred appeared at the farm. When he came at last, walking up from Glen Court along the meadow path, he met her loitering in the wet grass, her dress pinned up, and a basket on her arm. Patience had sent her out to look for mushrooms, and they were few and far between, and so her boots were soaked, and her bare hands very cold and wet. Yet Sir Wilfred, as he walked slowly to meet her—slowly, as he had never walked to meet her before in his life—thought what a matchless picture were the dainty figure and the beautiful shaded face.

"Mushrooming?" he asked, holding her wet fingers in his, only for a moment.

"Yes," she answered, brightly, looking at him from the depths of an ugly old sun-bonnet which Patience had given her "to save her hats;" "and it has really been to-day what Andy so expressively calls it, 'much roaming.'"

"How is Andy?" Sir Wilfred asked, as if he were glad to turn the subject from Brenda herself.

"Better, Sir Wilfred, thank you ; and happier."

"That's right. I want to speak to you seriously of him, Brenda. Will you listen now?"

She looked into his face, wondering at the change in him—wondering because he never used to hesitate at saying what he would to her, wondering because his words had always before been quick and bright and unpremeditated ; and because his eyes used to be so proud and happy, and had never had those shadows in them. But she understood the change, and met it wisely, as her loving spirit prompted her.

"Do you think these are plenty of mushrooms for sauce for dinner, Sir Wilfred?"

"Plenty."

"Then I will just walk back with you, please, and listen while you tell me what you advise for Andy. My poor little boy! so few have spoken of, or to, him since—since he went away."

"And perhaps they will not for a time," he answered, as they walked side by side—she on the path now, and he on the wet grass beside her—"and for that time he will not be happy here. I want you to take him away, Brenda ; quite away from here."

"Is he—doubted still?" she faltered. "Is Miss Gartret afraid of trusting him?"

"No," he answered, quickly, "Miss Gartret has nothing to do with my wish. She has gone away, Brenda, with my aunt—neither my home nor Miss Power's will receive either of them again, I hope. No, it is not that Andy is doubted, but I do wish him to leave here."

"Oh ! Sir Wilfred, do you mean it?" she cried, wistfully.

"I do, indeed, my child," he said, a little catching in his voice ; "I do indeed mean it."

"Why, Sir Wilfred? Has not Andy been proved innocent?"

"Dear, every one knew that he was innocent—as we may, in this case, understand innocence—long ago. No ; he is not doubted, nor feared, but a change would be best for him. Trust me for having thought deeply and seriously of this, and trust me when I tell you it will be wise and kind towards Andy. If you would rather not go, Vaughan is ready to take him."

She raised her head with a swift, intent look into his face ; but his eyes were on the grass before him, and she could not read their glance.

"Sir Wilfred, I will take Andy wherever you think it right for us to go, or wherever father decides for us."

"Thank you, Brenda ; that is kind and prudent," he said, in a tone of intense relief. "I will see Mr. Yorke to-day, and all shall be arranged without trouble or fatigue for yourself. And now one last word, my darling !"

It was the old story of his undying and unselfish love ; the old

entreaty that he might bear her troubles for her, and give her rest, and ease, and joy ; the old prayer that she would give him the happiness which no one else could give. And once more, with quiet, patient strength, did Brenda hide her pain, and—for his sake—refuse the bright, pure gift he offered.

He had gained his wish about Andy's departure ; yet, as he walked from the farm that morning, Mr. Yorke muttered that the young baronet's face was growing worn and lined.

Through that day, there slowly grew in Brenda's heart a doubt and fear which she could hardly understand even herself, and the very shadow of which she could not bear to acknowledge. Hour by hour it grew and deepened, until at last, in the evening-time, the hot, lighted room, and the sight of Andy poring over a picture-book, grew unbearable to her, and she left the house.

When she came back, Malcolm Vaughan was at the farm, so she stood in the chill night-air, waiting for him. When he came out, he could see nothing of the white, eager face, he only felt her touch upon his arm, and heard the hurried, whispered words—

"Mac, I was waiting for you here. I want to ask you—I've no one else to speak to, Mac—tell me exactly—*exactly*—how Sir Wilfred Glenhore saved Andy, that day in Bristol?"

He did not answer at once, and her words grew more frightened.

"You know you have always kept the papers from me. You know I could never speak to any one about it, so that I could not hear. Tell me?"

Still he was silent, and she tried in vain to see his face, and to find his answer there.

"Tell me, Mac," she pleaded again, more quietly. "I am not too childish to understand."

"He is free, and at home with you, Brenda. Is not that enough?" he asked, softly.

"No. I have thought so until to-day ; but not now."

"And now?" he asked, as if to gain time.

"Now I think—I have been thinking," she faltered. "I have been thinking a great deal to-day—and—Mac, I think Andy must be—what you call—on—bail. Is he? Is he?"

Again Malcolm was silent, and her hand once more was laid pleadingly upon his arm.

"I am not too cowardly to hear the truth," she said simply. "Is he?"

"Yes."

"And—who was bound for him?"

"Sir Wilfred Glenhore."

"Sir Wilfred Glenhore!"—she repeated the name slowly--
"Mac. it is he who wishes me to take Andy away."

"Yes, dear."

"To take him away," she repeated, "so that he shall not be here for—his trial. Is that it?"

"Yes; that is it, dear. Sir Wilfred will not let him be here for his trial."

"It would be very, very wicked," she whispered, "I will never do it. Oh! let Sir Wilfred know this, Mac. Tell him that I will never do it. You can tell him firmly; because it is a thing *you* could never do yourself, Mac, isn't it?"

Vaughan answered nothing; he was looking oddly and searchingly at her in the darkness.

"Mac, *you* could not act such deceit, could you—could you?" she repeated, with strange wistfulness.

"I see that *you* could not, Brenda," he answered, smiling sadly; "and I will never ask you again."

"No, I never would, Mac. Please tell Sir Wilfred no one could ever persuade me. Andy shall stay here and suffer for—that crime; and I will tell the truth, every word of the truth; and then—perhaps—the shame for me, and punishment for him will—kill us both!"

"Hush, Brenda, hush!" he murmured, with real anguish in his voice. "Do not speak so, dear heart, I cannot bear to hear you."

"I know—I feel that you could not do anything deceitful. Mac," she cried again, her voice broken by sobs; "and I trust you to tell Sir Wilfred how impossible it would be for me."

"You may trust me, dear."

"Yes, oh yes, I do."

"And you trust Sir Wilfred too?"

"I don't know," she faltered, "he—he is so good to Andy, and he feels that—oh, you understand, Mac—that Miss Gartret and Miss Glenhore would not have hated us, if it had not been that he loved—I mean if it had not been for him. And so he forfeits everything but Andy's safety, and my happiness. He would rather we went away, whatever it might cost him, than that we suffered. So I want you to tell him something from me, very firmly and very decidedly—will you, Mac? Tell him that, though I promised I would take Andy away, I recall my promise. Andy shall stay and meet what punishment the law must give him."

"Will no persuasion change this decision?"

"None—none."

"Tell Sir Wilfred yourself to-morrow, dear," he added, unable to bear the mournful determination of her words.

"No; you tell him, and tell him soon, please. Tell him his name must not be sullied by any deed of ours; he has borne too much for us already. Tell him it will not make it worse for us,

because the cloud is upon us now, and it cannot be heavier even then. Tell him that I shall see him once again ; just when I stand by Andy at his trial, and tell the whole truth to the Court—every word that Sir Wilfred has in his kindness withheld ; and tell him how after that, as before it, Andy's life and mine will be smoothed for us, and that I shall always pray that his may be as happy as I have often dreamed of its being, and as good and noble as it is in his power to make it. Oh ! Mac," she cried, as her thoughts flew back to those old dreams she spoke of, "the trial that is coming will not be so hard as you fear ; for I'm sure—I'm sure—the heaviest cloud of all has passed. Now I will go to Andy, please. He is sitting very silent, because Patience has vexed him ; and I know he will like me to go back."

"He is a happy boy always when you are with him, Brenda," Malcolm said ; and then he bade her good night, and went away across the dark, wet fields.

But he never thought of the darkness, because, even if the noon-day sun had been shining at its brightest, the great hot tears which were so strange and unfamiliar to his eyes, would still have blinded him to all around.

CHAPTER XIV.

GONE !

BREAKFAST at Glen Farm was half an hour late, yet Andy had not appeared.

"Did you ever know the boy anything *but* late?" Patience asked, as she set the coffee-pot on the table with a bang.

Mr. Yorke had not sat down yet, so Brenda, taking advantage of the circumstance, slipped out into the garden, and round to Andy's open window.

"He is up," she said to herself ; "he has opened his window as usual. Andy! Andy!" she called ; but the boy did not answer.

Stooping, she took up a little light gravel in her fingers, and threw it against the glass, at the same time raising her voice, regardless now of her father or Patience. But the young face did not appear, as it had always been wont to do at her summons, and she grew nervous and fidgety.

"He is so changed !" she thought, as she walked slowly back. "And yet I never fancied he would neglect my call, because he has never changed to me. His face always brightens at sight of me ; his voice is always glad in its greeting to me."

As she passed through the kitchen, Patience called impatiently after her that it was quite enough for one of them to be late, and

keep the meals about all day. But Brenda only answered that she would make haste, and went on and tried her brother's door.

It was locked still, and even while she called to him she knew, as well as if she could see inside, that the room was empty. She ran downstairs again, trembling pitifully; and while Patience fumed and scolded, she took a ladder, which she could hardly have lifted at another time, and set it against Andy's window. Rapidly she mounted, and looked in; but the empty room gave her no surprise, she had been so sure before that Andy was gone.

"Father," she said, her voice full of fear, when she entered the house again, "Andy is gone."

"And about the best thing he could do," snapped Patience, breaking the pause which followed Brenda's speech.

"Nonsense, Patience," retorted her master. "It's not the best thing he could do, to go off alone; the boy isn't fit for it."

"Well, if he isn't, it isn't worth bothering about. The less fit he is for it, the more likely he is to be caught, and put where he'll be taken care of."

"Brenda, child, what are we to do?" asked her father, nervously. "I don't know where the boy is, yet I shall be blamed."

"No one can blame you for this, father, if you do not know where he is," returned Brenda, quietly. "I am going now to seek him."

"Take your breakfast first," called Patience. "For goodness' sake, show a little sense sometimes."

"I cannot, thank you," she answered, gently; "I must go at once."

Carrying her hat in her hand, and the chilly morning wind rushing against her burning temples, Brenda walked swiftly to The Highfield. But Mr. Vaughan was out; he had not been home, his housekeeper said, since early on the day before. Then, after a minute's shy, embarrassed hesitation, Brenda walked out into the high road, crossed the low grey bridge, turned through the iron gates of Glen Court, and walked up the avenue, her swift, light footsteps falling upon the withered leaves, which two men were sweeping from the drive.

The men stood a moment and touched their hats to her as she came up. No one on all Sir Wilfred's wide domain but knew the beautiful girl, about whom there were so many wild romances woven, so many spiteful stories told, and so many different conjectures hazarded; and no one but looked at her with double curiosity now that, as they thought, it would be a disgrace to the young ~~baronet~~ to have his name breathed with hers.

Brenda stopped involuntarily. Should she ask one of these men to bring his master here? It would make her errand so much more easy to her. She suppressed the thought with quick pride, and walked on. The grand old silent house burst upon her as if she had never seen it before in all her life. So hushed it seemed within, so bright and untrodden without, that no rougher feet might ever have passed over the velvet turf than those of the light-footed, listening greyhounds, or the brilliant-plumaged birds which kept aloof in stately listlessness.

Round to the servants' entrance went Brenda. How else should she enter his house? She was but one of the village girls; and knew that there were those in his service who were of better parentage than she. She would go among them feeling this; and when dim, bewildering memories floated back to her, of the way Sir Wilfred used to picture her entering his home, she crushed them bravely back.

"Yes, Sir Wilfred Glenhore was at home. Would she walk in?"

The footman held the door wide open, but made the most of his position, and stared with intense curiosity into Brenda's face. This was odd, he thought. This had never occurred before. He must relate this in the 'all. She was a fine girl; a very fine girl indeed, with a charming blush, and about the 'andsomest eyes that could possibly look at a fellow.

"Perhaps you'll walk into—into——"

Poor Mercury evidently did not know into which room to ask Miss Yorke, but she never noticed his dilemma.

"Would the steward's office do?" he inquired, with sudden brilliance of idea. "Mr. 'Aig is away, and I'll ask Sir Wilfred to come to you."

Brenda followed him, not caring in the slightest whither she was taken.

"What name, if you please?" demanded Mercury, posing himself elegantly at the door, to await the reply which he knew as well as she did.

A few minutes after the sound of his step had died in the long corridor, Sir Wilfred entered the office, and anxiously begged her to come to a brighter room.

"I think this is very pleasant. Sir Wilfred," she said, looking round it absently. "I only want to tell you that Andy is gone."

"Andy gone!" he repeated, standing beside her chair. "How was that?"

"I don't know; we none of us know, Sir Wilfred. What am I to do?"

"Nothing, my—nothing, Brenda. There is nothing you can do. Who else is seeking him?"

"No one, unless" — she hesitated a little — "unless Mr.

Varghan has heard now, and is searching for him. He was away from home when I went to speak to him."

"We will hope that Andy is with him," said Sir Wilfred, very low.

"But it is such a very slight hope."

"And if so," he went on kindly, "we may feel sure that Andy is safe. If not, Brenda, I shall find him; we cannot both of us fail. You rest, my child; do not fear or fret. I will promise to—bring you together. Now tell me exactly how and when Andy went away?"

Still standing by her side, he led her on to talk of Andy, until her sorrow lost its bewilderment, and she was able calmly to think and speak of it. When she rose to go, he did not attempt to detain her. He took her hand in his for one moment, telling her not to fear, for she should see Andy soon, as he would not rest until she did. Then, when she had thanked him in quiet confidence, he walked down the avenue beside her, and stood at the gate until she was out of sight; turning then into the lodge, and talking lazily for a few minutes with the curious old woman, whose eye had been at the corner of the muslin blind to watch him.

Not for a single hour during that day could Brenda be still. In and out of the house, up and down the stairs, from the garden into the meadows, from the fold into the outbuildings, even to the coppice, which she had hitherto so shrinkingly avoided, she went, looking ever for Andy; sometimes calling to him with a sobbing voice, and sometimes quietly creeping along, expecting to find him hidden. But he never came. Then the shadows fell from the wings of night, and at last the wings themselves drooped low upon the glen, and closed above the tired world.

The days crept by without tidings. Patience Kempe's temper grew sharper now that Mr. Yorke's anxiety was roused; and Brenda, in very fear of her, went quietly and quickly about her work, her trembling fingers rapid and sure, though her heart was aching sorely.

At last, one day, in the fast-deepening twilight, Sir Wilfred came into the silent kitchen, where she stood alone, resting her aching head at the window.

"Brenda," he cried, as she turned, "how tired and wan you look! I have brought you tidings. Ah! there come the roses back, my dearest, and it is I who bring them. What would I not give to make you always happy; to fully and entirely satisfy you, my child, always so cherished, always so dear!"

For one moment—for the last moment—her strength failed her, and her hands went out to his; but even before he saw it, she was very still and calm again.

"Sir Wilfred," she whispered, in a tone which reminded him

at once of his broken resolution, "it is only my longing for Andy."

"Andy is found," he answered, standing beside her, the twilight shadows battling with the firelight on his bright head, "Andy is found. Will you come to him, Brenda, for he cannot come to you."

"Sir Wilfred—oh! Sir Wilfred, he is in prison again! Oh cruel—cruel!"

"No, not in prison, Brenda," he answered, gently, "but still he cannot come to you. Will you come to him?"

"Yes; oh! yes. May I ask father now to take me?"

"No," replied Sir Wilfred, with quiet determination, "that will not do; Mr. Yorke must not leave here, nor even know where you go. You will understand the reason of this presently, but now you can only trust me, Brenda. Will you go?"

His voice was true and earnest, and she did not hesitate for a moment. "I am ready, Sir Wilfred; when shall I go?"

"Now. Who is at home?"

"Patience; she is at the linen-press upstairs."

"That is well; leave her there."

"My father is at the stables."

"We will go round to him, Brenda. Put on your hat and cloak; wrap yourself up well, for we have a cold journey before us."

She dressed in nervous haste, and then they went out together in the heavy gloom.

"Mr. Yorke," said Sir Wilfred, in the tones the farmer would as soon have thought of gainsaying as he would have thought of gainsaying his own, "I have news of your son, but we cannot bring him unless Brenda comes. She is the only one who has any influence over him, and she is coming now to use it for his good. I will take care of her, believe me. Now she has only time to bid you good night, and when you see her again, I trust she will have her brother with her."

There was an anxious emphasis in Sir Wilfred's words, which Brenda felt without understanding, and which made her good night to her father almost as loving and as lingering as it would have been if she had known what journey was in store for her.

CHAPTER XV.

A NIGHT JOURNEY.

A LONG drive in a closed carriage, with lamps blinking fitfully at the windows; a pause in a lighted station; and then a rapid journey through the darkness.

All these incidents came back to Brenda afterwards, as parts of a strange but vividly remembered dream—came back with the restful feeling of sitting at ease in Sir Wilfred's thoughtful care, and feeling that she was going to find Andy.

Twice through the night they stopped, and then he made her rest beside a cheerful fire, and brought her wine or coffee, waiting on her himself, though men pleasantly offered their services to the grand young English gentleman, who travelled with such idle ease himself, and yet was so keenly observant of the comfort of his companion.

Not once did Brenda ask whither she was going. She listened when the names of the stations were called, but she never asked how many more they must pass before their journey would be ended.

Dawn was just breaking over the distant hills, though it had not reached the city roofs, when they left the train at last, and drove through the sleeping streets of a great town. Then Brenda, hardly knowing how it had all been managed, found herself in a boat upon the sea, Sir Wilfred's fur rug almost covering her, and his watchful eyes and ready hands still busy for her comfort. Up at last upon the deck of a great waiting vessel, and there close to her, with his old rapt, happy face, stood Andy, watching the sailors at their work.

Not for the first few moments did he see her, but when he did, such a quick, glad cry escaped him, that she forgot everything about this strange journey, in the eager joy of holding him once more within her arms. And his joy was so great that for a long time she could not calm him.

"They told me you were coming, Sis," he cried, dancing at her side. "Don't let them take me back *there*."

Shivering as she listened to his voice of trembling fear, and remembering what lot *she* had chosen for him, she could not answer.

Sir Wilfred was not near her now; she was alone with Andy, so presently she whispered, bending over him in her great bewilderment, "Andy, why are you here?"

"I'm going," he whispered back, in a voice of subdued delight, "to a new country—with Mac."

"With Mac?"

"Yes, with Mac, Sis, to a fine new country. I know it, you see—I know it all. Yes, with Mac to a fine new country. Here they are! Listen now, Sis. Aren't we going to a fine new country, Sir Wilfred?"

"Yes, dear lad."

"And, Sis"—he drew her head down to his, whispering still more eagerly,—“I'll nev touch one again, I've pro-

mised. But I'll help Mac, and we shall be good again, and enjoy ourselves."

"Brenda," said Sir Wilfred, reading her very thoughts with his intent gaze, "come; the ship is ready to sail. Vaughan and Andy must go."

"Go!" she cried, holding Andy tight within her arms; while he cried that she must not leave him, that he wanted her, and that she had said she would never leave him.

"Brenda, will you come, please; the boat is waiting. I said you would see Andy, and you have seen him. Will you say good-bye now—to him and Mr. Vaughan?"

"Mac," she faltered, and Sir Wilfred dared not look upon her anguished face, "I thought it was wrong."

"Yes, dear," he answered very quietly, "and so did I; but I do not think so now, nor does Sir Wilfred."

"Why, Mac?"

"Because I cannot."

"Why? why?"

"We cannot think it wrong, Brenda," he answered very seriously, "because they would only have kept our poor boy watched and guarded—taken care of too, let us say. That I can do myself, in a country where he can be happy too. I will watch and care for him. I will teach him all I can, and help him not to miss you very sorely."

"Oh, Mac! And your home here——"

"Has never been a very tempting one, dear," he answered, in a low but unbroken voice; "Andy and I will try to make the home out there a better and a happier one. Good-bye."

"Oh, Mac! And this you do—thinking nothing of yourself—in your great, unselfish love."

"This I do, dear, because I am happiest doing it," Malcolm answered, gently. "Good-bye."

"Oh! Andy! Andy!" she sobbed, "this is too hard to bear!"

"Brenda"—Sir Wilfred's voice was broken, despite his effort, and his face was growing white and worn in this last and best struggle of his love for her—"we may not wait. Come, we have not a moment to spare."

But she did not even hear him, as she stood with her arms round her little brother, her head bent upon his, and her face hidden. Sir Wilfred, moving aside, spoke in a low tone to the captain of the vessel, who, looking round with quick comprehension, walked up to Brenda, and touched her gently.

"The ship must be cleared of all but her passengers," he said, touching his cap, but speaking in a tone of evident authority.

"I am sorry to hasten you, ma'am, but I really cannot allow one minute more."

Drawing her breath quickly, she raised her head, and shrank back to Malcolm's side.

"I cannot say good-bye to him, Mac," she faltered, pitifully. "We have never parted before, and the words will not come."

"Say it first to me, dear," he whispered, without attempting to comfort her.

"No, I cannot. Oh! Mac, all this you are doing for—for—our sake—my sake! Oh! Mac—dear Mac!"

Malcolm's eyes grew dim—so dim that he had to turn them hastily away, even as she clung to him.

"Good-bye, dear heart," he whispered, brokenly. "Don't try to say the words yourself; they're always hard ones."

"I—I—we have never parted before, and—we have only each other."

"Sir," said the captain, politely, but firmly, to Sir Wilfred, "your boat is waiting. Will you take the lady down, if you please, at once?"

"Mac"—Brenda's hands were clasped now, and her eyes, swimming in tears, were fixed upon his face with a look that stopped the very beating of his heart—"Mac, I am to go. Oh! take care of Andy, and may Heaven help him to love and cherish you! But—I cannot—cannot go! Oh! what can I do to show you I am grateful?"

"To the boats, please!"

"Oh! Andy, I cannot say it!"

"To the boats!"

"Stay!—stay!"

It was not Sir Wilfred alone who turned his eyes from the pleading gesture, and that piteous longing of the beautiful young face. But still, sharply and authoritatively, the call sounded again—"To the boats."

Then, as its echo, rang a low and rapid cry—

"Oh! take me with you!—take me too!"

"Then it is I who have to say good-bye, Brenda," said Sir Wilfred, in the grave, sad tones which had lately grown habitual to him, and which were ever kind and very tender to her. "It is only here that I think I could have borne to part with you. You willed that we should part, and so I have prayed that—if, at the last, it must be so—I might leave you—here." He had her hand in his close grasp, and his eyes clung sadly to her face through these last moments. "Everything is on board for you, Brenda; I sent the order for everything a lady needed for such a voyage. Vaughan will show you, for he has helped in arranging all. My

request to the captain to dismiss you was only a stratagem to hasten your sad parting—or your union. I took your passage, feeling this might be your wish—feeling that you would choose—them before—me. I am thankful for it to be so—I am, indeed—as my own entreaties were so vain. Heaven bless you ever, my first love!—Heaven bless you ever in your home afar! Good-bye, Vaughan. You will both be very happy, and this time of sorrow will fade from your lives in the brightness coming. Andy, dear lad, you have your sister with you now, and she loves you as she always has loved you; so you, of course, will be happy too. But remember your promise, lest you should pain her, and be untrue to yourself. Remember the busy, useful life you are to live, out there in your beautiful new home, and how you are to help and care for everybody, and never touch—but you have promised, and I know you will keep the promise. Good-bye!—good-bye!”

CHAPTER XVI.

SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY.

THE June sunshine rests upon Glen Court, and in its softened evening sweetness Gertrude Glenhore stands at one of the windows, looking out among the trees. A little girl leans at her side, and a baby boy lies playing on the sunlit grass. It is a glad and greeting cry from the child beside her, which breaks the mother's long, long thought.

“There's papa with a gentleman! Look, mamma!”

Gertie watches the child dart through the window to meet her father. She watches Sir Wilfred lay his hand tenderly on the little head: and then such a gladness fills her heart, that she forgets to wonder who the strange gentleman can be.

“Gertie, this is Mr. Vaughan. You remember Malcolm Vaughan?”

She looks up with eager welcome, and gives her hand to Malcolm; and if she has ever thought—as Brenda did seven years before—that they two, as they stood together, seemed very far apart, she must feel now—with the unconscious solution of Brenda's wonder—that *something* has brought them near to each other.

“I am very glad to see you back in the old place once more, Mr. Vaughan,” she says in her pretty, earnest voice. “My husband has almost expected you ever since Patience Yorke died. Mr. Yorke has sadly longed for his daughter.”

“Thank you, my lady,” Malcolm answers, with his old quiet-

ness; "I am indeed glad to see the old place once more; but most glad of all that Mr. Yorke has consented to go back with me. Brenda will be so happy!"

Even the tone of these few words tells his listeners what joy *her* joy can give him.

"Her father's letters have grown so yearning," he continues, "and her heart has kept so true to him, that directly we heard his wife was dead, she wished me to come over, and tempt him to come back with me."

"You find a great change in Mr. Yorke, do you not?"

"A wonderful change, my lady. He is gentle and forbearing, bitterly regretting his harsh treatment of poor Andy, and even *tender* in his love for Brenda."

"If you could see him when he comes here to show us her letters, you would indeed notice the wonderful change in him. I think the hard life he led with his wife during those six years she lived after their marriage, did him good in every way; it certainly has made him feel the value of the gentler love which he had never appreciated."

"He has had a quiet thinking time, my lady," Malcolm answers, without a word of blame for Patience.

"Yes; and Brenda's loving letters have opened his eyes to many things. Tell me of Brenda, will you?"

"She thought to write to you, my lady—and I think she really did so more than once, though she never gave me any letter after all. But she bid me tell you she is very, very happy; that there is not a wish or longing of her heart unsatisfied, nor a brighter spot, in all that great new world, than her own home. Nor, indeed, is there," Malcolm continues, in a voice of intense emotion, "and others feel it so besides ourselves. If I tried to tell you, my lady, how much my wife is loved among the settlers; how she is sought after, far and near, as friend and comforter, as mother and sister, I never could do so. I never could tell you of the unselfish life she lives among them; I never could tell you how the children run to meet her; how old and feeble hands seek hers in trust and full reliance; how dying heads are raised to listen for her step; yet how, through all, her place at home seems ever filled. We are always together, my lady—always; she says she is happiest so, and—and that being true, my life is full of love and gladness."

"And your boy?"

"Our boy," Malcolm answers, a smile dancing in his eyes, "is beautiful, like his mother, but the most daring child in all the State. He keeps me in a continual state of fear, but his mother is never afraid. She can manage him by a word—by a smile almost, my lady, for he is most gentle and obedient, in spite of

his high spirit. The one thing perhaps of all others—except the beauty—which our boy inherits from his mother, Sir Wilfred, is his devotion to Andy Yorke. These two are always together; and the child's care of his uncle, his tenderness over him, his boldness to act in his behalf, his small watchful attentions, are as good to see as Andy's blind and gentle devotion to the little one; and that," continues Malcolm, with low earnestness, "is enough to make me forgive myself for my part in all that has been done against the law, Sir Wilfred."

But Malcolm's glistening eyes turn quickly to Lady Glenhore's again, as if he can scarcely yet venture to meet Sir Wilfred's.

"Andy has made himself friends everywhere. A gentle, useful, helpful fellow he is, ready to do anything for anyone. He seems, my lady, almost to be *thoughtful* to help them. He has grown a man, but will never be strong; and both Brenda and I cannot help seeing that he will not long be spared to us. It is when I think of this, Sir Wilfred, that I feel, more than at any other time, that our unlawful deed was pardonable—if I may say so, sir. The years he has spent since that one act was committed have been good years for him, and we have no fear for the day when—at the touch of his Father's Hand—there will be light for the poor dim spirit."

There is a little pause among them, which Malcolm himself breaks, speaking to the children with a change in his voice; and Sir Wilfred lifts his little daughter to kiss him, and tells her to send her dear, dear love to Brenda. Then they go in and dine together, talking of Vaughan's new home, and of the changes he has found in the Glen.

The late June twilight is fading softly when Malcolm takes his leave. Sir Wilfred and his wife come out upon the terrace with him, then while they stand watching his receding figure, Gertrude nestles up to her husband.

"Mr. Vaughan is quite a gentleman now, isn't he, Wilfred?"

"He always was, dear, I think; a thorough gentleman in heart and mind."

"Wilfred, it has done me such good to see him."

"Why, my darling?" He asks it absently, while he smiles at her unusual earnestness.

"Because he said such things of you while he talked to me alone—such true things, my husband. He told me that he found every tenant on your estate thought of and cared for. He told me he found your name beloved in all the county. He said—and oh! Wilfred, it is so true!—that the gratitude and blessing of the poor, and the warm love of many friends, have made it a name than which there can be none higher in all the land."

"But he could not tell you, dear," Sir Wilfred says, "to whom all this at first was owing. My true little wife, you know it as I know it myself; and it has never grieved you to hear me say it. If he tells Brenda of the change, bid him tell her, also, that it was *attempted* because she used to wish it. Will you do this, Gertie?"

Understanding why he gives this task to *her*—understanding, as she does now, almost every thought of his noble and chivalrous nature—Gertrude raises her face with a smile of assent. It is a face so pure, and so innocent of any taint of jealousy, a face so bright with love and sympathy, that her husband bends and kisses it involuntarily, with as long a kiss as if he had never touched the soft, sweet lips before.

"And I know it will make Brenda glad," she says, "as it ever makes me glad, dear love, to hear of all the good you do; of all the kind and ready help you give; of all the hearty, grateful love you win."

"In the little that I do, it is you who encourage me, dear wife, and who help me more than words can tell."

"Wilfred," she asks, and though her tone is shy and anxious, her eyes are full of confidence in his reply, "you are happy now—quite happy?"

"Happier, my darling, than you can even guess."

"Wilfred," she goes on, taking his hand between her own, "do you know I used to think so many thoughts, which I have proved to be all wrong and mistrusting ones? I used to think, when I heard you praise Brenda Yorke, and when I knew you loved her, that your praises were exaggerated, and your love—misplaced. She led a quiet, lowly life, I thought; what could *she* do great or good? She was but a peasant girl; what right had *she* to win such praise from you? I even used to think you were wrong in letting her brother escape, when everyone said he ought to be in confinement; and ironical when you said you paid the fine with intense gladness. I did indeed, Wilfred, think all this, though I hardly knew that I did, because I was really anxious for everybody to be happy. But I have known since, especially to-day, that I did think so, and I wanted to confess it, Wilfred. I have thought that Brenda ought not to have gone out with Malcolm Vaughan and married him so suddenly. For a long time—while I knew so much, and yet so little—I used to think that hers was a spoilt and disappointed life. To-night I feel, as I said, that my thoughts have been mistrusting ones. Wilfred, I used even to pity her,—ah! what need to pity her now? I know she has been good and wise above us all. In high and pure simplicity, she has acted for every one's good; and her noble, self-renouncing love has made us all most happy. Such a

life could never be a spoilt and disappointed life: could it, Wilfred?"

"Such a life as she has led, and is still leading, brings its own unspeakable blessing," Sir Wilfred says. "It is a lesson to us all, my dearest; for He who has chosen the humblest hearts for His own dwelling-place has not always set the highest in the highest places—perhaps that we may learn to seek the highest **everywhere.**"

BART BANNATYNE'S CITY HOME.



As no ghosts haunted the dim old rooms, there were, of course, other reasons for the house being so cheap ; and whenever Bart Bannatyne recalled this fact, a feeling of self-gratulation prompted him to laugh in his—I was going to say sleeve, but the word must be amended, for Bart's sleeve—buttoned with three cloth buttons, highly glazed by age—clung so tightly to his wrist that even his thin and wiry chuckle could not filter through it. No ; it was in his throat Bart chuckled whenever he recalled that day, thirty years ago, when this old city house had been let to him for twenty pounds a year, while the triumph had been considerably heightened by the fact that the next door rent had been raised at the same time, for the benefit of a new tenant.

Naturally some people accounted for the bargain by the total deficiency of comfort in the dwelling, but to Bart this deficiency was nothing when weighed against financial advantages. Certainly the rooms boasted none of the modern improvements which have grown into necessities in other houses ; but what were these trifles to Bartholomew Bannatyne, Esq., when for twenty pounds a year he could rent a large Dublin house ? True he could have lived even more cheaply in the country, but then the country—bah ! And when Bart used that word, he raised his elbows, shoulders, and eyebrows in a manner which added vastly to its legitimate expression.

Mr. Bart Bannatyne, in the twilight of a certain April evening, made an unusual tour round this desirable dwelling of his, and chuckled more than ever over his bargain.

Five of the rooms were unfurnished and tenantless. Try as he might, Bart knew that he could not occupy more than one bedroom at a time, and so there were five large and unnecessary empty rooms between the long dark sitting-room, in which he sat making these calculations after his tour, and the attic where Mistress Susan Mahone slept, when she was not silently gliding about the echoing house, working for, or waiting on, her grim and solitary master.

These apartments were certainly not very light, and had even a

taint of mouldiness about them ; but there could be no doubt that a girl who had not a farthing more than thirty pounds a year would be very grateful for any one of them. Only the worst of it was—and Bart gave an impatient shake to the *Dublin Evening Mail*, which he was airing at the consumptive fire, the heart of which had never felt a poker—"girls' natures are too shallow for gratitude."

The *Mail*, that night, contained harrowing particulars of the distress among the Lancashire operatives, and so Bart—it being his duty, as partner in a Manchester firm—muttered a good many contemptuous epithets, before he turned the paper over on his knee, buttered a slice of thin cold toast, and poured his cream-less tea into the saucer.

The twilight in the city street was as unsteady and as spiritless as the firelight within ; and, even united, they had no power to bring a ray of warmth or brightness to the rigid face of the old man who sat in their cold embrace.

Bart had sat for half an hour before the great square tea-tray, when Mrs. Mahone, who never waited for a bell, came in and carried it away without a word. Bart watched her close the door, placidly admired her silent movements, and then turned his leather chair from the table, and drew a letter from his pocket. Twice or thrice he must have read this letter, for his eyes were fixed upon the paper for several minutes, though its black border was so broad that there was little room for writing.

"I didn't like the girl," grunted Bart to his distorted shadow, as it leaped backwards and forwards on the ceiling ; "and I'd plenty of opportunity of judging, during those two dull days I spent with her and her mother in the country. A flighty chit of a girl, who dressed herself out every day in ribbons, and thought of nothing else ; a girl, I'll wager, who spends half the day in dressing, and the other half in reading novels. Her mother was the proper person to look after such a useless piece of baggage, and now her mother, forsooth, must go and die, and what's worst of all, let her money die with her. The girl ought to have had other people belonging to her, and not have been thrown on me in this way. She has—let me see—thirty pounds a year of her own ; but, if I take her in, she must pay me the half of that. There will be the difference between providing for two and providing for three ; besides, her room must have something in it. Well, I'll do it second-hand ; and she can't increase the house rent. I suppose she must come, as she has nowhere else to go. It's rather hard, though, when a man has been lucky enough to escape having daughters of his own, that he should be saddled with other people's. She must turn her hand to help Mahone, and never plague me with her girlish idiocies."

This matter having been settled so cordially, Bart lighted a candle that stood on an old writing-table in one corner of the room, and began an elaborate business epistle, which set forth, with the sternest and most uncompromising sincerity, the terms on which his orphan niece would be received in this grim old city house.

Bart Bannatyne had been young once upon a time, though his step-brother's standard joke was that Bart had been born both rusty and musty; he had been young once upon a time, and in that far-off time he had even valued and cherished the love of mother and sister. Before this mother and sister had learned the hard and selfish nature of the lad, they were laid side by side in a churchyard among the Wicklow mountains, and Bart's idle father married again soon after, and gave Bart a little step-brother and two sisters.

James Ryle, the step-brother, grew up keen and speculative, and his Manchester business prospered so well that Bart listened to his shrewd and bland proposal, and, after a deep investigation of accounts, agreed to become sleeping partner in the thriving Manchester house. From this time, with his small gray eyes wide open to his advantages, Bart drew only his hundred pounds a year, never varying the amount by any chance, chuckling and rubbing his hands over the consciousness that he could call up thousands whenever he should choose, because he knew he never should choose so long as he could feel they were accumulating. But he liked the idea, and was very welcome to it for all James Ryle cared, so long as he made such a good partner; never crossing the Channel, and never requiring more than his half-yearly remittance of fifty pounds, delivered to him every Christmas Eve and Midsummer Day by hand. That was Bart's one grand stipulation; the money, sealed, was to be paid him by the manager in person.

Bart's step-sisters had both been left widows early; Mrs. Sullivan, the elder, with one boy, who at her death had been taken by his uncle James into the flourishing house in Manchester; Mrs. Elliot, the younger, with one daughter, the girl who had been just then left an orphan, and was to be so willingly adopted, and so tenderly protected, by her step-uncle—if there is not such a relationship there ought to be, if only to suit Bart Bannatyne.

In his solitary musing—no, Bart never mused; he only calculated—there did not enter his mind the possibility of any clinging affection the lonely girl might feel for the little country cottage where she and her mother had lived so peaceful and happy a life. He looked on the change merely as an inconvenient one for himself, an unwelcome one for Mrs. Mahone, and an enviable

one for Janet herself, who would have been thrown on the proverbially cold charity of the world if he had not come so warmly to the rescue.

Mrs. Mahone brought in her master's hot water and tumbler, whispered "good night," and went and locked herself in her attic. Bart sealed his letter, and then let himself into his cold bare chamber, never troubling himself to wonder whether with joy or sorrow the coming footfall would presently echo in the long room above him.

* * * * *

Except that there were two cups on the great square tray, nothing in the aspect of the room showed that a guest was expected. The tea was "drawing beautiful," as Mrs. Mahone said (it was well for Bart's tea to draw for as long a period as possible), when a jaunting-car drew up to the door, and a girl's light figure sprang from it. With a nod to the woman who had opened the door, the girl stood and paid the driver, and then ran in, leaving her luggage to its fate.

"Where is—— Oh!"

This exclamation was elicited by the sudden appearance of Mr. Bannatyne, his eyes starting from his stooping head, and his hands resolutely clasped behind him.

"Who put you on a jaunting-car?"

"I put myself, uncle." There was a tearful gasp in the young fresh voice, and a sudden check in the quick step; but, while he stared at her in blank surprise, Janet enlarged upon her answer. "The cabs looked stifling, like the vessels at the North Wall. Why shouldn't I come as I did, Unele Bart?"

"Because no young lady drives so, through the Dublin streets; and, however poor you are, you need not behave improperly."

"I didn't," said Janet, boldly. "No one told me it was wrong. And why didn't you meet me at the station, uncle?"

The tightening of his thin lips grew a little ominous as he met the fearless, questioning eyes.

"Why didn't I meet you?" he repeated, in a tone of chilling sarcasm. "Because I didn't see the slightest necessity. Mahone, shut the door."

What a contrast was the stiff, gloomy woman who carried the candle before Janet, to the happy-looking maid at home, who had been wont to run so briskly at the girl's coming! But no greater contrast than was the slow step of Janet herself, on the uncarpeted staircase, to the fleet, swift footfall belonging to that happy life which had been buried for ever now, beneath the sordid soil of this one day.

"This is my room, is it, Mrs Mahone? Thank you."

"Do you require anything more, miss?"

"Yes, a great many—I mean no, thank you—nothing more."

Bart, from his old leather chair, turned a little, to let the girl see that he had expected her to be quicker, and his hard face was full of displeasure as it fell upon her. She, a girl thrown upon his charity, a slip of a girl of seventeen, looking about her as she came into the orderly room, and shutting the door without even turning the handle.

"You have never offered to kiss me, Uncle Bart. Don't you want to?"

Even with the young face close beside him, and that quaint question on the lips, Bart answered, with exceeding coolness,

"I felt very unlike kissing you when I saw you drive up to my door as you did. Have you no desire to be ladylike?"

"No, uncle. Do I need the desire when I *am* a lady? I am a girl and a woman and a lady, and so I must be girl-like and womanlike and ladylike. Why, I cannot help being so, can I?"

"Nonsensical logic!" muttered Bart. "You looked anything but ladylike perched on that car. But if you don't care yourself, it doesn't matter to me. Let us have tea now, if you please. I have waited five-and-forty minutes for you already."

Janet turned to the table with a huge lump rising in her throat, but she threw back her head with a gesture peculiar to her, and intended to give incipient selfishness or discontent a check.

"What a large tray, uncle!" she said, presently, speaking without a tremor in her voice. "It reminds me of the school tea-drinkings, when I used to pour out the tea for fifty or sixty people. And here are we, only just twice one."

"Why not say 'two?'" growled Bart.

"Because we have hardly settled down into a couple yet, especially with this tray between us. We seem just one and one I won't mind the tray, though," she added pleasantly, "if there will never be anything else bare and bleak between us, Uncle Bart—figuratively, of course, I mean."

"What's the use of speaking figuratively when there are straightforward words to express straightforward ideas, if you have any? That's one of the new-fangled notions girls are imbibing now."

"Do you really think girls change every generation, uncle?" said Janet, as she tried, after her day's fast, to appreciate a layer of potted bloater on her toast. "I don't see why we should."

"Janet Elliot, how old are you, pray?" asked Bart, looking sharply up from his cup into the girl's face.

"Seventeen and three months, uncle. Why?"

"Please don't end every sentence with a question," snapped the old man. "I asked because you appear to consider yourself

competent to have an opinion on every subject, and I should like you to remember, when you say things in this room, that you say them to a man just fifty-three years older and wiser and more experienced than yourself. Do you understand?"

Janet nodded, keeping her cup to her lips; but the fearless eyes had a swimming look in them when she took the cup down at last, and the rest of the meal passed in silence. In silence, too, the old man and the girl turned to the fire—a silence not unusual or unnatural to Bart, who had the paper in his hand, but a very unusual and unnatural silence to Janet, whose eyes were very, very grave in their steadfast gaze into the fire.

The little drum alarm had struck nine about half an hour or more when Bart looked up.

"We don't eat suppers here," he said, with a cheerful grunt. "You can go when you like. No—no suppers here; none of the extravagances which I daresay you have been accustomed to. You may as well understand, once for all, Janet, that I allow no waste, and countenance no luxury, in this house; but I took care you should understand all that before you came."

"Yes, uncle," returned the girl, as she rose, "you were very open and honest with me, and I will try to be open and honest with you, and—grateful; and I daresay we shall be so—shall be happy together presently. Will you try to remember, please, that I've never been alone before, but have always had some one to tell me what would be right? And, as you said just now, seventeen years' experience is not very much; and perhaps you will try to be a little patient with me, uncle, just at first."

"There, there," said Bart hastily, detecting some symptoms of breaking down in the clear young voice, "we know what to expect from each other. You'd better go to bed now."

The curtainless square bed looked coldly down upon the kneeling figure, the scanty furniture shrank closely and unsympathetically from its sorrow and loneliness, and the unframed almanac on the wall cruelly paraded the black effigies of the days which had to creep by between those dark walls. Janet, hiding her eyes from them all, crushed them from her thoughts, with a resolute bravery which perhaps they had never witnessed before, though of course they had travelled a good deal before they were sufficiently reduced for Bart's outlay.

* * * * *

"Uncle Bart," said Janet, on Midsummer Day, when a faint ray of sunlight had found its way into the grim parlour, where they sat opposite each other, dining, "will you come for a country walk, to-day?"

"Rubbish!" sneered Bart, taking his modicum of cheese, while Janet sat opposite and watched him. "The manager of the firm in Manchester is coming to-day, on his half-yearly visit, and he brings me fifty sovereigns, without which I don't suppose either you or I could have any dinners for several days to come."

"Is he not a cousin of mine, uncle?"

"Yes, I suppose so; but your mothers never had anything to do with each other; some woman's quarrel there was between 'em—the deadliest thing in the world, a woman's quarrel. But Mark did not fret at that, I'll wager. What does a man care for aunt or cousin?"

"What is Mark like, uncle?" asked Janet, passing over, as usual, his implied insult.

"Shrewd, and ready at accounts."

"But in the face?"

"In the face—bah! I've other things to do when he is here besides staring into his face and taking an inventory of his features."

"But that is not necessary, uncle," said Janet, with her clear laugh. "I know what a man is like without staring into his face and taking an inventory of his features."

"Ay, of course you do," returned Bart. "Trust a girl for that. Do it to-day, then, for he may stay to tea, though he rarely does."

"Oh, do make him stay, uncle!"

"Why?" asked Bart, looking up with a slow, stony gaze which sent poor Janet's courage to the ground.

"Never mind, uncle," she answered, rising wearily. "Let him go if he offers; and no doubt he will offer to go."

"Humph! A very gracious permission indeed. You may be sure I should not attempt to detain him; he and I have nothing in common except the business. Ring the bell, Janet."

"Susan," asked Janet of Mrs. Mahone, hesitating as she left the room, "can I help you, downstairs, this afternoon?"

"It doesn't matter, miss; you've done so much to-day."

So Janet went upstairs to her own room, and sat down upon the floor at the window, where still a little sunlight lingered, and opening her desk upon a chair, bent her head over it, and wrote rapidly for a few minutes. Then she raised her head, dreamily looking up into the changing blue above her, following with thoughtful eyes the little white clouds which floated in the bright expanse. Then suddenly she stooped over her paper again, her pen running freely and uninterruptedly along the lines, until another halting-place was reached, and another wandering gaze brought another thought or fancy into the busy little head.

One—two—three—four—five— The sonorous old clock told each stroke so deliberately that, when a sixth followed, Janet started up astonished.

Running downstairs, she entered the sitting-room behind Mrs. Mahone and the tray. But her pleasant little apology came to an abrupt termination when she saw that her uncle was not alone. There sat a gentleman opposite to him—a gentleman who did not look at all as if he belonged either to this grim old house or to the grim old man. So Janet thought, as she came forward, while Bart growled the intelligence to his guest that this was Janet Elliot, and to Janet that this was her cousin Mark.

She curtsied quaintly, but her cousin held out his hand, and then drew her towards the seat from which he himself had risen. After that, as if he had forgotten her very presence, he talked on with Mr. Bannatyne. Janet, for want of other occupation, noticed that he had rather an odd face; a contradictory sort of face, not at all like her dream-heroes, and not at all like any face she knew. Just when she had decided that his mouth was stern and sarcastic, she caught his eyes laughing like a child's eyes; and when she thought the eyes looked kind and grave, there would suddenly dawn a new look in them, of real anger.

"I never saw anyone like him," mused Janet in her silence. "But then of course I never saw a Manchester-man before."

Her criticisms were hardly brought to an end when at last he turned and chatted with her, making the very smallest and most common-place remarks imaginable.

"I should think I look very young, Mr. Sullivan," she observed, with a laugh, as she rose to pour out the tea, "or you would not ask me such juvenile questions."

"You don't look very old—yet," he answered, giving her the fancy that some hidden meaning lurked in the remark.

"You don't take sugar in your tea, I suppose?" asked Janet, musing over the meaning of that "yet."

"Why not?"

She blushed a little, but only because he sat down so very much nearer to her than to her uncle; she answered coolly enough—

"Because Uncle Bart doesn't, and I don't, and you belong to the same family."

"If that is real sugar in the bowl, give me some, please—a good quantity; you need not spare it, for Uncle Bart is sure to have abundance of sugar, as well as all other sweet things, stowed away somewhere."

"I thought only children and fools sweetened their tea," grumbled Bart, taking up the paper to show his contempt for his companions.

"Then, Uncle Bart, you are mistaken, for I am a man, and a man of sense, and I want more sugar—at least twice as much, Miss Janet, as you put in before. Uncle, your grocer sends you an adulterated article. Being a good customer, and paying the best prices for everything as you do, you should be supplied with the best goods."

Janet glanced at her cousin to see how much of this he meant, but, though her eyes were very wide, she could make nothing of his face.

"These sardines," he said, presently, "are scarcely fit to have been sent to such an excellent customer as you must be, Uncle Bart."

"Don't eat 'em, then," growled Mr. Bannatyne.

"They will get worse if I don't. Of course you would not be likely to keep a box of sardines too long on hand in *your* household, uncle. Pass up the box again, please, if there are any in it."

"It's half-full, at least," said Bart, passing it at as short a distance as he possibly could.

"Is it? It will be empty, at most, when I return it."

It was indeed empty when Mark rose lazily from the table and rang the bell, standing at the chimney-piece to watch the effect of this action upon Janet—watching so closely that he seemed to see nothing of Bart's cold, prolonged stare. Susan came in as much astonished as either of them at this unusual summons.

"More butter, please," said Mark, politely, as he resumed his seat. Mr. Bannatyne forgot to warn you that we should be a larger party than usual this evening."

"I forgot nothing of the kind," snapped Bart, as Susan noiselessly disappeared, "but I did forget what a bear you were, or I should not have asked you to stop."

"I have come all the way from Manchester," said Mark, passing his cup to Janet cheerfully; "the least you could do was to offer me the privilege of drinking tea with you, sir, and that you did. The most you could have done would have been to welcome me hospitably, and that you did not do. Thanks, Mrs. Mahone. Now Miss Elliot wants the teapot replenished, for she has drained it for me."

"Please, Susan," added Janet, with a pleading look which was not lost on Mark, though he was apparently busy with the butter.

"I hope James will send over one of the other men at Christmas," observed Bart, stonily.

"No you don't, Uncle Bart," Mark Sullivan contradicted, with great coolness; "you don't want 'the other men' to know how much you draw; and, if it were sent sealed in half a dozen

places, they would be sure to find a way of peeping in—such is the insatiable curiosity of that biped Manchester-man. Miss Elliot, don't notice that speech of Mr. Bannatyne's; of course he did not mean to mention 'the other men' as if I were one of the common herd."

"I see," said Janet. "How many more cups do you think you shall require?"

"This one will satisfy me, thank you; but I shall send it to be filled many a time and oft."

"Come, get on with this stupid meal," interrupted Bart. "I want to go."

"Then go, sir."

"I will thank you to remember in whose house you are!" fumed the old man, rising with an ugly scowl. "Janet, you have finished, at any rate."

"Not quite, uncle; I shall want another half-cup presently."

"To keep that fellow in countenance, I suppose," he snarled;

"a pretty donkey you look, stuck up there waiting on him!"

"A *very* pretty one," said Mark, lazily; "the prettiest I ever saw, for they are not, as a race, remarkable for their beauty."

Bart stammered something below his breath, in which rather an ugly word was distinguishable, and then left the room, banging the door behind him.

There was a moment's perfect silence, and then Mark pushed his cup and saucer away, and rose with as hearty a laugh as those old walls could ever have re-echoed.

"Why are you laughing?" asked Janet, her eyes full of wonderment.

"*Why?*" he echoed, leaning forward with his two hands on the back of the chair from which he had risen. "I'm laughing at Uncle Bannatyne's exquisite knowledge of saving, I'm laughing at my own efforts to thwart him, and I'm laughing most of all at you."

"You appear," said Janet, her lips quivering with anger, "to have a talent for gleaning amusement from—from things."

Janet would have finished the sentence tellingly if she could have hit on a word in time; she would even have left the room if she could have done so with dignity. But somehow she could do nothing but rise and stand a little way from him, with her hands on her uncle's writing-table, the fingers playing nervously with Bart's thin blue paper.

"It is a talent which I hope to cultivate," he said, watching her keenly; "a talent which the example of my generous uncle encourages me to cultivate. Look up into my face for one moment."

She did so, too proud to refuse or hesitate, and, as he met her truthful eyes, he asked, a little sternly—

“Is he hardening your spirit and blighting the freshness of your youth, as he would blight and harden mine, if I were in your place?”

“You have no right to ask,” she faltered, angrily fighting with the tears that welled up behind her big bright eyes.

“No right at all,” he admitted, calmly, “not even a cousin’s right; because you and I have never been as cousins, and now can never expect to be. But I ask you nevertheless, and on this plea—I am a man, and no man on earth can bear to see another man oppress a woman.”

“I never said Uncle Bart oppressed me,” stammered Janet; “he does not indeed.”

“That’s well,” said Mark, giving a slight touch to one of the restless little hands upon the table. “I will ask no more. I am going in half an hour. Shall you not be glad?”

“Yes—not very,” she answered, discreetly.

“Gracious concession! You dignified little lady, what in the name of all that is incomprehensible do you do with yourself all day and every day in this beast—dingy habitation?”

“Many things,” answered Janet blushing, as she recalled her favourite occupation.

He watched her face as the vivid colour faded, and then he suddenly asked a question which startled her. “Shall I leave you my address?”

“Why?” she asked, simply.

“Practical little Miss Janet, how can I tell why? You may wish to invite me to tea again, as I could not manage to bring any appetite to-night; or you may be seized with a desire to send me a five pound note. Shall I leave it?”

“No, thank you,” she answered, a little stiffly.

“Very well. I must go now to that little cavern which our esteemed relative calls his office. Good-bye.”

Janet felt intensely relieved when his keen, quizzical eyes were gone, and forthwith sat down upon the rug to enjoy herself. She did not like him—that fact was certain; yet whether she was quite glad that he was gone she did not know; the room, or the atmosphere, or something, had certainly felt more genial that evening, in spite of the little squalls. Whether he was good or wicked was a point upon which she mused a great deal, though with no satisfactory result. But this one fact was plain—she did not like him. It did not signify why, she told herself, finding her reasons rather hazy, only—she did not like him.

She had settled this matter to her entire satisfaction, when the door opened suddenly, and Mark Sullivan entered the room with

a quick, impatient step. His face was in a perfect glow of anger and Janet asked, involuntarily—

"Is anything the matter?"

He hesitated a moment opposite her, as she looked up anxiously from her place upon the rug.

"Nothing, except that my talent has worn itself out; for I cannot glean amusement to-night, even from the hard dealing of an old man's barren heart and brain. It maddens me more than words can tell to have anything to do with him. Oh! you poor little lonely child, you would be better off in the poorest home on earth that had a mother at its head."

"Do not mind me," said Janet, with a wonderful child-like purity on her raised face.

"Janet," he said, drawing his lips back from his closed teeth, "does he—do you have enough to keep you strong and well?"

"Oh yes," she answered, hurriedly, "abundance."

He smiled a little grimly.

"Do you know that that old man is very wealthy, yet lives in this house, with you and a servant, on what ought hardly to keep himself alone in one room?"

"Why does he keep his money?" asked Janet, simply.

"Heaven only knows—unless in the hope of buying mercy at the last. Good-bye, my child. Take this."

She took the paper he put into her hand, but forgot to open it until long afterwards; when, finding it was his own name and address, she laughed at his freak, and carelessly dropped it into one of the narrow yellow drawers containing her gloves and ribbons, repeating to herself, as she did so, that she did not like him. But that night, when she tried to go back and dream a little over what she had been writing in the afternoon, the heroes of her own tales had no power to obliterate from her remembrance the contradictory face which would persist in puzzling and perplexing her.

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Punctual to the day, twice in each year, came Mark Sullivan to the old house; and now he always stayed to tea, and still was just as incomprehensible to Janet as he had been at first.

Two years had passed, and the gloomy home had brightened a little under the touch and voice of the brave girl who never complained or fretted, and who kept her own sweet gaiety through all hindrances and all rebuffs. She was nineteen now, a graceful girl with an artistic daintiness about her, and the light of a brave tenderness in her eyes.

"Not very old even yet," she said to herself, laughing, as she

looked into her little glass, "but very much older than I was when he came first."

This reflection was made on Midsummer Day, as the church clock struck six, and Janet prepared to go down and make tea for her uncle and Mark.

Janet knew that her uncle was in one of his worst moods this evening, because Mark's arrival had been later by an hour than it had ever been, and so she was not surprised when, on entering the parlour, she heard his raised, sharp tones.

"Why d'ye bring in those things yet?" he asked, as Mrs Mahone carried in the tea.

"It is six o'clock, uncle," explained Janet, as she followed.

"It's *not*, I tell ye, and if it is I don't care. Half the afternoon was wasted, and I haven't finished with Sullivan. Go back," he cried, raising his voice still higher, "go back."

"We have quite finished business," said Mark, white with passion. "Come in, if you please, Miss Janet, and give our thoughts a brighter turn."

"I will put off the tea an hour; shall I, uncle?" the girl asked, gently.

"Put off what you like, only keep away from here!" stormed Bart.

"Then I will wish you good evening, sir," said Mark. "I am not going to stay in this room to see Miss Janet turned out of it. If she stays, I stay; if she goes, I go. Probably you may arrange this imaginary business more amicably alone, sir."

"You will go if she goes, will you?" sneered Bart, looking from one to the other, with a malicious sparkle in his eyes. "Oh, *that's* the way the wind lies, is it? Stay where you are, Janet. You would not go when I sent you—be quiet, girl—so now I forbid you to go. Stand there, and look at this modest fellow—the manager of our firm. I needn't call your attention to his upstart nature, because you've seen it often enough; but see this new phase of it."

Here Bart paused to rub his hands and chuckle. Then he went on, with a hiss on every word he could possibly emphasise.

"Your noble cousin, Janet, anticipates a change in his prospects, to be brought about by a marriage with the heiress of the richer of the partners in the firm where at present he is only a servant—a position naturally galling to an ambitious spirit such as his. This good stroke of business—this masterly stroke—is to be consummated during his half-yearly visits here. An heiress! We'll tell him what a great heiress you will be; shall we, Janet? You tell him—tell him now. Let me enjoy his enjoyment."

The girl's face was as white as death, as she looked at her uncle in piteous appeal, and her hands so tightly grasped the back of a chair that the sharp-strained knuckles told a whole tale of suppressed agony.

"Tell him now," continued Bart, rubbing his thin hands together, with the relish of anticipation; "tell him what sort of an heiress Janet Elliot is to be, and let us see *then* whether he cares to leave the room because she leaves it, and to stay because she stays. Ha, ha!—a good joke that!"

"I cannot say I see the joke, sir," observed Mark, with inimitable ease, his eyes in every direction save Janet's; "if you enjoy it, pray laugh on—it is a novelty to see you laugh, under any circumstances."

"Oh, oh!" chuckled Bart. "That is your plan, is it? Miss Elliot's imaginary fortune is to feather *your* nest, eh?"

"I never, for one moment, gave a thought to Miss Elliot's fortune, whether real or imaginary," returned Mark, quietly. "She will believe me in this; and whether you do, or not, signifies nothing to me—nothing at all. I would only beg you not to make yourself uncomfortable on any point, nature having made you sufficiently so. Your money would never benefit Miss Janet, and certainly never win her such love as any man would be proud to give her for herself. As for me, there is no power on earth would make me touch one penny of it. Your hoarded, worshipped gold would burn an honest hand; so buy your pardon with it when you will; and be sure you try to invest advantageously the sum you take yearly from your orphan niece—Heaven help her!" added Mark, the angry sarcasm on his face turning to sorrowful tenderness. "Dearly and unchangeably as I love her, it darkens my own life to picture this gloomy, grinding one of hers."

"Ha, ha—you love her *so*!" sneered Bart, eyeing him superciliously, and putting infinite expression in that last word. "You love her dearly and unchangeably, do you? And when she marries a rich man—senior partner in just such a firm as that in which you are a servant—what is to become of this charming love of yours?"

"I will tell you when the circumstance occurs," replied Mark, coolly.

"Thank you, thank you, my dear nephew. That is kind. And you, Janet," he added, with a quavering laugh—"stay where you are, there's no need for you to slink away now—pray let me hear you tell this modest young man what you think of his generosity. Our manager, in search of an heiress, hides his defeat scientifically under a little maudlin sentiment, eh? Mr Sullivan, you shan't be disappointed; allow me to introduce you to an heiress

—heiress to thirty pounds a year in her own right; not a penny more, my dear sir, not a penny more."

"Uncle," said Janet, raising her head with the old spirit which had been kept in restraint so long, "are your insults over? Your words have brought such burning shame into my heart that never from this hour——"

She raised her hands suddenly from their hold on the support of the chair, and pressed them both upon her lips; starting back while the crimson rushed over her face and neck, and the passionate brilliance left her eyes. Then she had crushed back the angry words, and left the room—conqueror over herself. But that night the bare walls of her chamber told her nothing of Bart's avarice; even their incompleteness seemed only to prove a completeness possible out beyond, in the wealth of God's great world. The yellow furniture looked kindly on her now, for in one of the drawers there lay a little paper unnoticed hitherto, but which this evening had caught a new light, and made a poem of its few written words. And the almanac showed less distinctly the black, spiritless numbers which told off the days that were passing than the vague, bright, possible numbers of the days that were to come.

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The fire burned sulkily—Bart Bannatyne, Esquire, never managed to supply himself with bright and briskly burning coals—and Janet sat before it on the rug, looking up pale and tired, to see that the hands of the alarum pointed to an hour past midnight. The house was chill and lonely, for Mrs. Mahone had been in bed for three good hours, and Mr. Bannatync had not returned from an inquest he had been bidden to attend that afternoon. He had said he should dine at the country inn, so Janet was not anxious, but she was weary of waiting for him, and she leaned her head upon his chair, listening anxiously for his step.

Half-past one! Janet had risen, and was walking restlessly about the room, when she became aware of an awkward fumbling at the front door. She ran to open it herself, but started back as her uncle staggered past her. The next moment she had sprung to his side, and put her arms about him.

"Uncle, uncle, what is it?"

"Don't make a fuss, child," he muttered, in an unsteady voice. "Can't you see what it is? Help me to bed. Don't send for any doctors, but see to my eyes yourself."

Without another word, she led him to his room, and then ran down and lighted a fire. When she went upstairs again, with the kettle in her hand, she found him moaning in bed.

"How was it, uncle?" she asked, softly, as she bathed his torn eyes.

"I lost my way in crossing the common. I suppose I turned aside from the road in the darkness; for I came to some rails which I felt must lead into the road, and, as I could not climb them, I crept under. There were briars piled and fixed on the other side, and they tore my eyes, as you see. Take care—take care! Oh, heavens, the pain is terrible!"

For the whole night Janet sat beside the bed, following the doctor's directions, in her swift, quiet way, and listening to poor Bart's fevered, wandering talk.

Doctor Surtees shook his head when Janet stood opposite him in the little hall next morning, questioning him with an anxious face.

"Your uncle has had an iron constitution all his life," he said, evidently puzzled to believe that this girl could really care about the old man, who had not one real friend in Dublin, "and he will recover his health, I firmly believe—but not his eyesight. But let him have the benefit of hope, until the acute pain is over. If he had taken a car, the few shillings would have saved— But it is too late to mind that. This agony I can allay in time; but it will only go, I fear, as the use of the eyes goes."

By slow degrees, Mr. Bannatync's pain diminished—the sharp agonising pain which he had had to bear, day and night, for weeks—and at last the shutters were open for the first time, in the room in which he had laid so long in darkness. Bart raised his head, moving his face from side to side, and then he turned slowly round.

"Janet," he asked, below his breath, "are the shutters shut?"

"No," said the young physician, gently. "The sun is shining faintly in. Can you see it?"

"Janet!"

She was on her knees beside him, watching him, with intense pity in her eyes.

"I am here, uncle—close beside you, where you will always find me now."

She lifted one of his hands, and laid it tenderly upon her lips, but his head was still raised, moving slowly from side to side, the blind eyes searching, feeling for the light.

"Are you in any pain now?" asked Doctor Surtees.

"None."

"That is well. Your niece has taken tender care of you, and will do so still. I am very, very glad to know you are free from pain again. We must be thankful for that."

"Janet," her uncle asked, with a clear sharp ring in his voice, "does he mean that I am blind?"

Still fondling the hand she held, Janet raised her face, and kissed his tightly-pressed lips.

"Oh, uncle, what is that compared with death, as it might have been, or bitter suffering, as it was? Uncle Bart, I shall be always near to help you."

"Blind!" he murmured. "Blind—always blind! Never to see the light again; never to see on earth another face—never!" Then he broke off with a bitter cry; and Janet, though she was weeping pitifully all the while, put her arms round him, and soothed him as she might have soothed a little child. And, unknown to him, the sunlight lingered round them as it had seldom seemed to linger in that room before, and some new voice, born of love and sorrow, spoke to the old man's heart.

* * * * *

Mr. Bannatyne had been so fretful and impatient during his illness that Janet had not summoned his nephew. That he would have had no word to say to Mark, had he come, she felt certain.

So it was that she awoke in great anxiety on the morning Mark Sullivan was expected.

"Susan," she said, pleadingly, "you will tell Mr. Sullivan of uncle's illness, won't you, before we see him? You don't mind very much, do you, Susan?"

"I don't mind a bit, miss. You've taken the trouble yourself all along; surely I should not mind doing that."

"Thank you, and ask him to stay to tea. You need not make any difference, Susan—just as uncle used to say."

Susan smiled as she turned away. There had been so great a difference in everything since Miss Janet had had the rule that she knew even her master, in his blindness, must feel it, though he could guess nothing of how Janet eked out his allowance with her own income and new earnings, and mended and turned the black dresses, and denied herself those little artistic adornments in which she used to delight.

Presently came Mark's knock upon the heavy front door; and Janet's heart beat, as she persistently continued her reading aloud.

"Uncle," said Mark, entering ten minutes afterwards, with even more than usual of the careless ease of old times, "the lock of your front door wants repairing. Have you a screw-driver in the house?"

Bart's head had been bent ever since he heard the knock, but it was raised readily now.

"In the long drawer in the office, Mark. It is very bad to have

the lock out of repair. Yes, you'll find the tools there, thank ye, Mark."

Then Janet's heart gave one joyful bound. If he had come in with pity, or an unusual tenderness to Bart, the poor blind man would have resented it—Janet had felt that from the first, and therefore had feared this interview so keenly. If he had come sympathetically, even to herself, it would have broken down her courage. If he had been satirical and contemptuous to his uncle, as of old, it would have been worse still. Now it was over better than she had ever even dared to hope, and Mark had left them to themselves again, and was making mechanical noises outside, which set her teeth on edge, but her heart at rest.

What a breath of genial life he brought among them, and how pleasantly the time passed with his merry anecdotes and chat! Janet felt her face sadden as he rose to say good-bye, but the colour rushed into it suddenly and proudly when he laid a little paper in her hand.

After he was gone, she walked up to the window, and read what he had written.

I shall wait within a few yards of the house until you come to speak to me. It is only of poor Uncle Bart I want to speak. Come fearlessly; I will not pain you by a word.

"Uncle, I have one little errand a few doors away. I will make great haste."

But still it was an hour before she re-entered the firelit room.

"Writing again!" Bart began, fretfully. "You are always writing; I should think you spend all your money in stamps, Janet."

"Not quite, uncle. I am ready to read to you now; and, as we have done with the news, I have a little story here."

"I never care about 'em."

"Don't you think?" asked the girl, in her rare, pretty earnestness, "that these stories help us a little in understanding each other? We cannot know very many people, in our narrow experience of life, but we can have many friends in our books; and don't you think sometimes they teach us how to deal with others?"

"No," said Bart, wondering a little at the girl's tone, though she spoke without a word of complaint against the narrow life to which he had doomed her. "Read the paper."

While Bart Bannatyne slept his first sleep in the room above her, Janet sat at her desk, her head on her clasped hands.

So Mrs. Mahone found her, when she crept up to the table with her silent step.

"Miss Janet," she whispered, "Miss Janet, dear, it is time to go to bed. I guessed you'd be up, so I came to see. To-

morrow Mr. Sullivan comes; and you wouldn't look pale and peaky before our only visitor? Miss Janet, dear," she went on, making odd little pauses in her sentences, "why is it that things seem changing? You don't provide things you did when the master first got better. Don't you be fretted if I say it, but you seem to be saving as he does, and as you didn't at first. You never get yourself a bit of anything new, I notice; you never have the same pretty sort of things you used to have. It doesn't matter much about it for you, because you must be pretty and bright, any way; but it is odd, now you're getting so much money, Miss Janet—begging your pardon."

"So much!" smiled Janet, sadly, and answered by no other word.

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Mark came next day, as he had now come to this home of Janet's ten times. And, when he had left, she sat, to travel backward in silence past these simple landmarks of her journey from seventeen to twenty-two.

"Janet," moaned Bart, "why don't you talk, child? Where are you?"

"Here, uncle—on the rug beside you. Put your arm about my neck—so. You feel now, don't you, how near we are together?—we two old friends and companions, who are always going to be together?"

"Yes, yes; but what's the matter with your voice? You have been crying," he added, sharply, one hand wandering to her face.

"Why, Uncle Bart!" she exclaimed, glad of the interruption, "that is Doctor Surtees's knock. How good—I mean how sociable of him to come so often to see you!" For Janet did not know that the young physician would have sat at his own fireside, in thorough indifference to poor Mr. Bannatyne, if poor Mr. Bannatyne had not had a winning little niece ever beside his chair.

This evening he forgot that his visit was even supposed to be to the old gentleman, and pleading gently and anxiously, he at last won Janet's promise to spend that evening with his sisters.

"Miss Janet," remarked Susan, criticising the girl's costume before she started, "the things are a bit old-fashioned for a party, but still you'll be as pretty as anyone there."

Old-fashioned! Janet knew they must be so, when she felt so many eyes fastened upon her in the crowded room.

* * * * *

What was there about the old city house to prevent its feeling to Bart Bannatyne just as it used to do in the old days, before Janet came? Everything had gone smoothly and comfortably without her then. Mrs. Mahon brought in the single plate and

cup to-night, just as she used to do, and took them away with her valued and methodical quietness. The house was orderly again, without that restless girl about it. Then why could not Bart feel comfortable and satisfied now? Why had the room this chilly void which it had never known in those old unbrightened days?

"Don't you hear her coming yet, Mahone?"

"It's only half-past ten, sir," Susan said, turning, as she replenished the fire, to look sympathetically into his blind, eager eyes.

"I see," he returned, raising his face to the clock, from force of habit; "of course she could not be home yet. I only inquired," he explained, nervously, "because I cannot hear the door while you bang the coal about."

"No, sir," assented Susan, as she noiselessly retreated.

Alone again, the minutes dragged like hours. Bart turned and turned upon his seat. "She might have come sooner, as she went so early," he grumbled. Surely that little timepiece had never ticked so wearily before. Ah! was that a bright voice whispering in his ear "Uncle Bart"? He moved slowly round in his chair.

"Janet?" he said, in a low, questioning tone. But he knew the call was only fancy. "Janet!" he cried again, chafing that he could not see—"Janet!" Then he waited once more, while the clock ticked on. "Janet!"—one more experiment, his voice raised this time to its usual tone.

"Yes, uncle, here I am."

There was no unreality in these words, no dreaminess in the touch of the soft hands and cheek.

"Janet," the old man murmured, in a tone of quavering gladness, "don't let people take you away every day; I'm growing old, my dear, and it's hard to be left alone in blindness. You haven't tried it, and you cannot judge."

"But, uncle, dear," she said, with something in her voice that sounded like a laugh, "you don't really object to my going out every day, do you? Because Doctor Surtees wishes me to spend every evening with his sisters—and himself."

Bart covered his sightless eyes in sudden pain.

"Listen attentively, Uncle Bart; this is because he has fallen in love with me, and wants me to marry him. Oh! Uncle Bart, I am blushing vividly."

"And you said—you said?" questioned the old man, with trembling eagerness.

"I said lots of things, uncle; but I suppose I ought to have told him to come to you."

"No, no," interrupted Bart, hastily; "never send him to me,"

"This is what you would say to him, uncle, 'Take her with pleasure, Doctor. I am used to living alone, and I like it best. You are a rich man, and I always bargained that she should marry a rich man.' You would say that, Uncle Bart?"

"Hush!" he whispered. "I—I couldn't spare you. You should not have come at all if you meant to go away so soon."

"So soon! Why, uncle, we have been together for five years!"

"Don't send him to me," said Bart again, still more fretfully.

"But, uncle," pleaded Janet, kneeling down before him, and laying one hand on each of his, "you might say this, you know—'I cannot give Janet to you, Doctor, so you need not ask me. I love her just a little, and I should like to keep her with me all my life, and she would like to stay.' Couldn't you say that Uncle Bart?"

"Yes, yes," murmured the old man, "that, and more."

"Then I would say, 'I am much obliged to you, Doctor Surtees, but I love Uncle Bart too well to leave him. We two are going to live together all our lives.' Uncle Bart, that is just exactly what I *did* tell him, and just exactly what I mean."

"Janet, don't joke with me." His trembling hands were steadily held in hers, but the trembling of his voice she could not steady.

"That," she repeated emphatically, "is just exactly what I told Doctor Surtees, and just exactly what I mean. Now, uncle, kiss me, and let us seal our compact—to take care of each other, and love each other, and never to part. Now I will tell you all about the party. They were all very grand ladies, uncle; and they rather turned up their noses at my old-fashioned dress—even aquiline noses can be turned up you know—and sometimes I saw them whispering together about me."

"Nonsense, Janet, they dare not. You are—an heiress, for all they know. But you must get new things, Janet—at once—to-morrow," continued the old man, feeling her soft dress. "And—are you sure you are not sorry for what you said?"

"So glad, Uncle Bart," she answered, in her cheerful, tender voice, "that if this day were to come once a week, for a whole year, I should say exactly the same each time."

Next morning Janet noticed an unusual briskness in her uncle's manner, and as she met him with her morning kiss, he cried delightedly,

"Ha, ha! Janet, my dear, we are going to have new dresses directly—silks and muslins—made as other ladies have them made."

It was well that, in his loving earnestness, he could not see the sudden puzzled grief of Janet's eyes. It was well that her

quick gesture of pain could not fall upon his eager, kind anticipations.

"Uncle Bart," she began, with a little gasp, "if you say those things to me I shall never be happy again. I hate silk dresses—I do indeed; and you will hate to touch me if I rustle to your touch. And as for muslins, I catch cold in muslin. I'll tell you what, uncle," she added, quickly, "I will promise to look fashionable, if you wish it, without anything new."

"You cannot, my dear," opposed Bart, promptly; "I know that much of women. You must have the dresses and look as pretty as you used, though now I may not see you. Only," ruminated the old man, "if these doctors are to turn up continually, I shall have no peace of my life."

"They are sure to turn up continually, uncle, if I dress finely. If I don't, they will not notice me."

"But I can afford it; and on whom should I spend money if not on you, Janet? I shall see about it at once," asserted Bart, a new excitement on his sightless face. I haven't had a conversation with James for twenty years. I will write to him after breakfast."

But after breakfast, when he had sat for nearly an hour before his writing table, he called Janet to him.

"I cannot remember to keep my finger on the right line, Janet, and if I once lose it, it is gone for ever. James will hardly be able to read it, will he, dear? Perhaps you had better write it for me."

The tears started in Janet's eyes as she saw the paper he had been filling—line written over line, and one word crossing another.

"Tell him," began Bart, resting in his chair, "that at last I want to see him. And tell him of—my blindness. Address it, 'James Ryle, Esq., Manchester.' That's all—he is as well known as the mayor. I only put that thirty years ago, and the firm has been growing in importance ever since."

Janet bent quickly again, and sealed the letter with a trembling hand.

"There, uncle. I will post it myself."

Shut into her own room, Janet opened her desk with hurried fingers. She wrote one page, and, putting it into a large envelope, she slipped in with it the letter she had brought from the parlour—and on the address of this letter there was no mention of James Ryle, Esq., or of such a town as Manchester.

Three days had passed, when Janet, with rather a frightened look in her eyes, brought her uncle a letter.

"It is not from Mr. Ryle," she said. "Perhaps it is from Mr. Sullivan. Shall I read it?"

"Yes—I daresay James has set out for Ireland—read it," said Bart, eagerly.

"MY DEAR UNCLE,—Mr. Ryle being abroad at present, I shall have the pleasure of waiting on you in his stead to-morrow.

"Yours faithfully,

"MARK SULLIVAN."

"I don't want *him*," fretted Bart.

"If you do not like to speak to Mr. Sullivan about these things, uncle," said Janet, with suspicious eagerness, "leave it a little: just say nothing about it."

"Nonsense, child! if I cannot see the master, I must make the manager do."

Mark arrived soon after his letter, on the last morning of the old year, cooler than ever, to hide the softening of his voice as he discussed the old man's plans.

Bart told his nephew that he wished, from that day, to draw a larger income from the business, explaining why he wished it; and, while Janet's face told a contradictory and independent tale of its own across to Mark, during the explanation of her needs, he assented to all his uncle proposed, and agreed that Miss Elliot's very necessary expenditure ought indeed to amount to more than it did, making a note of what Mr. Bannatyne thought would meet the demand, that he might bring the next remittance accordingly.

"You will dine here, won't you, Mark?" asked the old man, almost warmly, when the business discussion was over.

"No, thank you; I have an appointment in Grafton Street at three, and have ordered dinner. But I will come back to tea, according to old custom. Not that I like inviting myself, as I am naturally such a modest fellow; but Miss Janet was very slow about it to-day. Uncle, let us two have a jaunt to the park; there is the freshest breeze about that ever blew. Janet must not come, because she is going out as soon as dinner is over, up to Grafton Street, to do some shopping—an arduous occupation, and requiring a reserved amount of strength."

The old man went away cheerfully on Mark's arm, and when, at the sound of his return, Janet ran from the kitchen, she met him looking fresh and pleased, and she kissed him with a happy kiss.

"I suppose Mark left you on the steps, uncle," she said. "I am so glad he is coming to tea. I have made some cakes."

"Does Mark eat as heartily now as he used to do when I could see him?" asked Bart. "I never hear so much about it."

"Why, what should have caused his appetite to fail, uncle?" questioned Janet, avoiding a direct reply.

"I suppose it would be odd," Bart answered, as he took up his fork; "but one gets to imagine things, when one cannot make sure of them by looking. I never used to imagine anything."

"I love to imagine things," said Janet, tenderly. "I do not think life is half what it can be when we only just make use of our senses, and do not live a little way beyond."

"Among the non-senses—eh, Janet?"

"Yes, unele, that is exactly what I mean. I was not speaking of great resolves and aspirations; only of simple, ridiculous, childish, wild, sweet, nonsensical flights to nowhere and back again. Pass your plate, unele."

Instinctively the girl seemed to know how anxious the old man was, in his helplessness, to help himself, and it was good to see how constant and watchful she was to help him, by making it seem that he did everything for himself. Only, if she were going to leave him, this was very cruel; for, while he was so utterly dependent on her, Janet knew what a keen pleasure to him was the fancy that he needed no guide at all.

Janet started out that afternoon with an unusual hesitation in her step; for she could not bear that her unele should think she was going out to purchase the garments he desired for her, whereas she was only going because she felt that Mark had intended her to go—had meant to meet her himself, when he had said he had an appointment in Grafton Street at three; and had meant to tell her not to fail when he said she had shopping to do there as soon as dinner was over.

Mark and Janet returned to the old city house together, and when Mark had opened the door with her latch-key, Janet hurried into the parlour; but before she reached her unele's chair, she started back, white and frightened.

He sat upon it, his face buried in his hands against the arm, and an utter despair in his whole attitude. An open letter lay upon the floor; and Janet's first feeling was one of relief that, whatever it might contain, those poor sightless eyes could not have mastered its contents; but Mark, who had followed her in, took it up at once, and saw a reason in the old man's sorrow.

"Unele," he said, in his firm, quiet tones, "when did Mr. Ryle's letter come, and who read it to you?"

Very slowly, while they waited for his answer, Bart rose; Janet was close beside him, and she put her arm round him.

"Tell me the truth of this," he said. "What has James—what has that scoundrel done? Don't hide a word from me, if you have any truthfulness in you."

"He has told you himself, sir," replied Mark. "For nearly

three years, as he says in this mean, petitioning letter of his, there has been no house of business bearing his name. No man of business will ever honour his name again. But, in dishonouring his own, he has not dishonoured yours, sir, in the sight of God or man ; nor mine, though he ruined both of us at the same time."

"Go on," said Bart, through his teeth.

"The house failed, and he is abroad for safety, with a black line across his reputation."

"Out of my reach!" whispered Bart, his thin hands trembling as he held them from him. "Great heavens! I am a ruined man, you say?"

"Not ruined as your vagabond brother is ruined, sir," said Mark, his voice faltering a little, "you have your conscience clear, and your name unsullied."

"How is it," muttered Bart, "how is it I have been drawing my income just as usual up to this day, yet this failure happened three years ago? Only to-day I proposed drawing double, and you said it could be easily done. Sullivan, what do you mean?"

"Uncle," interposed Janet, before Mark could answer, her low voice contrasting oddly with her uncle's sharp, raised tones, "Mark found other employment, and he sent us—at least he brought us—twice in every year his money, just as he had been used to bring your own."

"Janet's own little income was still remaining; and that, and various sums she has herself earned by writing, have been used each time to make up the deficiency," said Mark gravely.

Bart's head moved slowly from one to the other, and his nervous, restless hands closed and opened almost convulsively, until Janet, in her fear, turned and kissed him.

"Go away!" he cried; then, in a voice of suppressed passion, "Mark, go out of my sight—I cannot bear you here. You would have deceived me to my death. Leave this house! Janet, go away."

Mark left the room at once. When Janet followed into the dim little hall, he only said quietly,

"I will stay in Dublin to-night, Janet, at this hotel. Look—take the card. Good-bye, my—say good-bye."

But she could not utter the word, try as she would; and after he was gone, Susan found her in the same attitude.

"Miss Janet, dear," the woman whispered, "have you been in to master? I daren't go in again. I tried to keep the letter for you, but he had heard the knock, and asked for the letter, and then he made me read it, every word, and then through again. Then he sent me away, and I have been frightened ever

since. What shall we do, Miss Janet? Are you going in again?"

"Not yet," said Janet, with her characteristic shake of the head; I will go in presently, when the first hard thoughts are over."

* * * * *

In the voiceless solitude a strange dim fancy clung to Bart. He was himself, he thought, shutting out the light for which he groped and searched in vain. He was himself gathering about him this darkness which was so thick and heavy all round. He was himself encouraging the blindness in which he staggered so hopelessly and helplessly.

It was a ridiculous fancy, of course, yet it clung to him nevertheless, in this voiceless, sightless solitude, until at last a little faint ray broke upon the gloom, and showed him what this darkness was, and how he kept the light away. Many and many an hour had Bart Bannatync spent in this room before to-night, but never one like this—never one which brought such strange new daylight on his lonely dreams.

"This is a fashionable time to have tea, isn't it, uncle?" said Janet, seating herself upon the rug beside him. "But I like it so much. The fire has not burned so clearly and so cheerily for long as it burns upon this last night of our old year. And—here are my cakes, Uncle Bart," added the girl, with a catch in her voice.

"Eh?" asked Bart, in a low, absent voice. "Is Sullivan here?"

"No, uncle, he is gone; and she turned her head a little, even from the darkened eyes.

"Gone! Why? Where?"

"Why should he stay, uncle?" she asked, pushing his chair to the table, and not reminding him by a single word of his angry dismissal of Mark. "Do you want anything that I cannot do?"

"I want everything," he whispered.

"Even tea? Come, that want is soon supplied."

She talked to him through the meal, not with any strained effort at gaiety, but with an easy naturalness which could not fail to win him from going back to the first thoughts of that evening.

"Where is he staying, Janet?" he asked, an hour after the tea had been taken away; and, though they had been talking of many people, Janet knew instinctively whom he meant.

"He did not tell me, uncle, but he left a card."

"Give it to me."

Wondering what use he could make of it, Janet put it into his hand; and then they sat together, talking softly and brokenly in the dying of the year.

* * * * *

A watchful car-driver, taking his fresh horse through the city streets in the early morning of the New Year's Day beheld a very unusual spectacle on the doorstep of "Miser Bannatyne's," as Bart's house was almost universally termed. A stooping figure stood there, with one arm raised, hailing at hazard any car which might chance to pass.

"Car, sirr? All right. Where to, sirr?"

"Can you read this card?"

"I can, sirr."

"Then take me there—fast! Will this pay you?" said Bart, holding out half-a-crown.

"I'll make it do, sirr. I'd not be bould to make ye pay the full on New Year's Day. Lean on me, sirr."

When the car stopped at the hotel-door, Bart looked forward helplessly.

"If anyone is here belonging to the hotel," he said, "I want to go to Mr. Sullivan's room."

And in his own room Mark Sullivan met his uncle, as if none but loving words had ever passed between them.

* * * * *

"Uncle Bart, isn't this a beautiful New Year's morning? The icicles sparkle like—oh! where is Uncle Bart?"

For Janet had looked in vain for him upstairs, and so had felt quite sure he would be here in the parlour. Could he be in the grim little office which he never occupied now? Just as she entered the hall, a car drew up, and she waited, wondering if it were possible that Mark had come back.

Yes, surely! That was his familiar knock. Janet opened the door herself, and there Mark stood upon the steps, with his uncle's arm in his, and his face all proud and glad.

"Janet," said Bart, brokenly, his thin hands folded round her arm, as she led him into the room where breakfast and a cheery fire waited, "I have been to fetch Mark. Give him welcome, my dear, upon this New Year's morning. He wants more than a welcome, too, from you, and he deserves it. Go to him, dear, and leave me here to try to change the little life that is left me. I have loved you—I think my heart has fed upon you, little Janet; but I know that your life ought not to have been tied to mine. Not that Mark told me this—he would not even ask for you this morning. Janet," he murmured, softly stroking her hands, his pleading face turned to hers so intently that he really seemed to be *looking* at her, "you will still keep a place in your heart for the old man who can never love any one else as he has loved you. Now take her, Mark. Are these tears? Why, tears should be far away to-day, dear! They used to come sometimes, in the beginning of this life we have lived together; but they should not come to-day."

Mark, take my child—quickly, before it grows impossible again. Mark, where are you?”

“Here, sir, at the farther end of the room,” Mark’s voice answered. “Where is Janet to go when you send her adrift?”

“To you, Mark. I—must spare her now.”

“Oh! then you aren’t sending her away from yourself, after all, Uncle Bart,” said Mark, cheerily; “for we all know that she refuses to come to my home, unless you come too.”

“Mark means,” said Janet, softly, with the very brightest blush, “that he refuses to take me unless he may take you too, Uncle Bart.”

“What do you mean, Mark? What do you both mean?”

“This, uncle; that unless you come and live with us in our new home, I must go back to my work alone.”

“Janet?” questioned Bart, turning his bewildered face to her.

“Yes, uncle, if you go, I go; if you stay in this old city home, I stay too. You and I are never to be parted through our lives.”

“But I shall be such a trouble and expense. I’m so useless and bad tempered,” he murmured, “a poor, helpless, sightless——”

“Dear Uncle Bart,” she interrupted, with a tender kiss, “you don’t suppose that either Mark or I believe one word of this. Oh! I do want my breakfast!”

“Mark, you will soon tire of the old man?”

“I shall be as likely to tire of my wife, sir,” Mark said, with a look across at Janet. “And she will not come without you.”

“Then—then take us both, and Heaven’s blessing be upon your home!”

“Now,” said Mark, a little brokenly, as he grasped his uncle’s hand, “we may wish each other a happy New Year—the happiest New Year we any of us ever spent, eh, Uncle Bart?”

Full gently he received Bart’s quiet wish; and then he turned and knelt beside Janet’s chair, putting his arms around her, and looking into her face with his eyes full of love. He did not speak one word, for he would not whisper in the presence of the blind old man; but she saw the great question written in his eyes; and, for her answer, she took his face between her hands, and kissed him softly on the lips.

ONE SUMMER MONTH.

Omagh, Co. Tyrone.

AFTER trying in vain to tempt little Dick from his painting, I am at last reduced to having a game of battledore with myself, in which lively pursuit I am surprised by Crannigan, who enters the schoolroom with a raised finger, and the modest inquiry, "Do you not think there is a great noise in this room?"

I have not remarked it, I say, hiding the battledore between myself and the table, and slipping the shuttlecock into my pocket. Has she?

"That is not the point to question," she returns, loftily. "My fear is *less* poor dear Mrs. Cortley's head will suffer."

Now as I know the suffering of Mrs. Cortley's head to be Crannigan's one illusion, and as the drawing-room, where the old lady is sitting now, is a long way off, and she is very deaf, I am not so much overwhelmed by this fear as I might have been.

"I wonder you can play that childish game alone, Miss Royes," Crannigan continues, unfortunately catching sight of quiet little Dick bending over his paints. But without waiting for an answer, she shuts the door and goes.

I put the battledore and shuttlecock away, and sit down beside my little pupil, to admire and criticise his vermilion representation of a rose. Being one of my usual occupations, its interest and excitement wear off presently.

"Dick, come and play 'I spy' in the garden."

"Wouldn't you drather sit here, Jean?"

Feeling suddenly ashamed of my preference for out-of-doors, I leave the correction of Dick's grammar until to-morrow. Ten minutes afterwards he drops his paint-brush, to stare bewildered at a queenly character gliding over the faded old carpet, and declaiming touchingly.

"You are always acting, Jean," he says at last, in a slightly injured tone. "Who is that?"

When the speech is ended, I throw off the "character" and answer him.

"That's Lady Macbeth. I'll tell you lots of things about Lady Macbeth some day, Oliver."—I call him Oliver because he reminds me of Oliver Twist.

"Don't act any more. Sit here, and let me read to you."

It is a thrilling narrative, the hero of which is a truant, who, in his pursuit of pleasure, meets the inevitable watery grave which awaits the truant of fiction. My feeble mind cannot grasp the full horror of the situation without various interruptory questions, which prolong the tale considerably. Yet the end comes, and there is still an hour before Dick's bed-time.

"Now tell me a story," he pleads, climbing on my knee, "a long one, about very wild beasts. A long one, Jean."

I tell him the old story of Androcles and the lion; and big tears gather in his wide eyes while I slowly bring the lion into the arena. And when the story is ended, big tears there are in my eyes too; though my thoughts have not gone with it, but have hovered about the unfinished story of my own narrow life.

I daresay that, years ago, Mrs. Cortley was a loving, anxious mother, and a devoted wife, her husband's will in all things being hers. Now she is scarcely loving even to her lonely little grandson, and anxious about nothing—unless she may be anxious, in her heart, to follow her seventeen children and their father—and Crannigan's will now is in all things hers.

She tires sadly of me, unless I sit quite still with my work, or talk in a distinct slow voice on the subject of bishops—a subject in which I am given to founder hopelessly. And, oh! sometimes I sadly tire of her. I try to remember that every beggar who comes to her door receives twopence; I try to remember how punctually she pays me my ten guineas every quarter-day; yet I cannot help so often tiring of her.

Except the servants, we are but four in the household, and I think there is but little sympathy among us. Apart from my association with Dick, neither Mrs. Cortley nor her companion takes any interest in me at all. They hardly seem to know whether I have a home or not—unless they rightly guess that, if I had, I should not have borne *this* cramping home so long. I certainly don't like teaching; I know I never shall like it; and I should very, very much like to have enough money just not to be obliged to teach. Still, I would not care to have even as much as Mrs. Cortley herself, if I must be, like her, under the rule of such a fussy old thing as Crannigan—companion, housekeeper, attendant, whatever she calls herself, to Mrs. Cortley. I never knew one person so devoted to another in all my life before. All her pride, as well as all her affection, is vested in her mistress. "A lady who has reared seventeen children," she sometimes says to me, "is a lady to be respected and admired. Four times has

she been the happy mother of two twins. Miss Royes, it makes me proud to wait upon her now."

Poor Crannigan! The "two twins" four times told seem to have lightened her burden considerably. She amuses me a good deal on the rare occasions when she will talk to me, because there are such unexpected turns in her phraseology. She is such a queer-looking woman too, with her broad, brown, fidgetty face, always set in an elaborate and highly-coloured bonnet or cap, and her wide feet encased in ankle-strap shoes. She would rather not go out at all than have to put on boots; and sandals she calls "full dress." She has a sort of rheumatism always floating over her, which has never, within my experience, descended and settled in any particular quarter, but which is often what she calls "threatening," on which occasions she has a lively fear that it is going to "lay her down." It never has done so yet; still the fear is as lively as ever. But for the expression of that fear, we might never guess the probable visitation of any malady; for if there is one thing to which Crannigan is more inclined than another, it is *embonpoint*, and if there is one thing to which she is more disinclined than another, it is the system of Banting.

Poor old Crannigan! I can see how valuable, or perhaps invaluable, she is to Mrs. Cortley; and her indifferent superiority to me is but a very little drop of bitterness in my cup. She has lived here for fifty years, and has known all the seventeen children whom their mother "reared," as she says, but who in fact all died in childhood except two—Dick's mother (who was drowned with her husband, when Dick was a baby), and the eldest son, Captain Cortley, who died since I have lived here, and has left an only son, who is heir to all his grandmother's property. I want to see this son, because I like his picture so much, he has such a pleasant face. I never liked his father, who used to come here regularly four times every year, and never brought a bit of pleasure with him, but quite the contrary. He was a regular Beau Brummel; never came downstairs until the day was middle-aged, and then amused himself through luncheon by asking ridiculous school-room questions of Dick, who of course never knew the answers, and so appealed to me—and I never knew them either. As long as the child only looked his appeal, I could avoid his eye by addressing a lively soliloquy to Crannigan, or resuscitating an interesting bishop for Mrs. Cortley. But when despair prompted him to question me, and Captain Cortley backed it up by inquiring whether "*that* was not an easy question for a boy of his age to answer?" the ceiling seemed to come down and press on my head; everything on my plate grew uneatable.

"If you *really* do not know, Dick," I would say with a serene

surprise, "I will tell you about it after dinner. I am too much disappointed to do so now."

And I did tell him all about it after dinner, but not before I had secretly referred to a reliable authority. I am afraid that if Dick had defied the interrogatory little captain, or at any rate relieved himself by shaking his fist at him in our solitude, I should have loved the child all the better. There are many very awkward things about a governess's life. She is expected to know such a number of little points, which don't make her life a bit pleasanter or cheerier—cases and declensions, and latitudes and meridians. If I had my own way, I should never interfere with any one of them.

Yes, I did dislike Captain Cortley; but his son does not look at all like him—Captain Arthur, he is always called, to distinguish him from his father, who was commander in the navy. I think it would be pleasant to have him staying here for a little time. I might hear a sound of laughter that was not my own. I might not be reduced to holding conversations with myself in the apple-tree after Dick is gone to bed, or rehearsing soliloquies in character, or making jokes, and pretending to be astonished at them, and amused. I might hear a young gay voice about the house; I might be spoken to, now and then, as other girls are spoken to.

I daresay I ought not to mind about any of these things, only my work; but, however much I try, my heart will not grow indifferent, and I cannot help longing and searching for something to fill it. I find many odd little solitary pleasures sometimes, too, and I pursue them under great difficulties—the pursuit invariably astonishing my sober little Dick exceedingly. If Mrs. Cortley would let us have some books, it would be different; but I know *Ministering Children* off by heart, and there is hardly another in the room, except Dick's lesson-books.

Bundoran, Co. Donegal.

"Resolved: That I will live with all my might." I forget whose words those were originally, but they are mine for the present. For this one month, I am going to live with all my might. It is the first long holiday I have had in all four years, and the first time I have left that square brick cage in Omagh, where so much of my life has been, and is to be, spent. How different this place is, with its fresh, broad, sea-born air, its stillness that is not stagnation, its restlessness that is not work! I feel as if we were all changed, as if we could not be the same people we were at home yesterday morning. I, sitting here on a little bit of the shore that has drifted away into an island, and is so almost-inaccessible that they call it Gibraltar; Dick, lying by me, watching the clouds; Mrs. Cortley, in her Bath-chair,

rolling slowly round and round the small green on the cliff behind us, which they call the Downs; and Crannigan sauntering beside her, under a large yellow parasol, and a brown hat of almost the same circumference. There lies no land now between me and America. Below me, a few little boats ride lightly over the sunny waves; others lean lazily resting on one side. Out into the sea beyond, stretches the bold brown headland of Killibegs.

How beautiful the scene is, and how thirstily my eyes drink in its beauty! Is it any wonder I should try to live with all my might? The very sea-breezes woo me to enjoyment; the waves laugh with me; the sunshine smiles upon the glorious hills. Following these examples, I will, for these few weeks, enjoy "right livingly."

Even little Dick is not half so glad of this holiday as I am myself. When he brought me word into the school-room, the day before yesterday, that it had all been decided suddenly, and we were to go to Bundoran next morning, I could not help kissing him a dozen times for his news. Then, laughing at his astonishment, I ran off down the garden, jumped on the low branch of the apple-tree, and let my glad thoughts have it all their own way. But he soon found me—the garden being about as much adapted for concealment as a billiard-table—and when he joined me, I kissed him again, and burst out singing so rapturously that his eyes opened to what must surely have been their widest extent, and he inquired coolingly, "Why I was so silly?"

"Because you are not, Oliver. You ought to be silly because you are so small, and because you have a holiday. But you won't be, and so I must."

He could not catch the light upon that reasoning; so I got him up in the tree beside me, and tried to find out what Bundoran was like.

"Oh! it isn't a very good place," said Dick, in his small practical way. "Crannigan says they are all Roman Catholics, and she used to see the girls kneeling in the wet streets with bare legs if they met a bishop, for him to bless them."

"Are the streets always wet, then?"

"I don't know; but that's what Crannigan says. And do you know, Jean, she says that not long ago—and p'raps now—there's an island not far from the shore, where they pray to an old figure, off a ship; they think it's a god, you know."

"Oh! Dick," I cried, screwing my mouth into contortions of horror, but laughing all over my face besides, "what a terrible place to go to."

"I believe you like it," he observed, sententiously; and I told him I verily believed I did, and jumped from my perch, and

raced him round and round the very round flower beds, until Crannigan tapped on the window-pane, and asked whether it would not be wiser in me to be packing my "things." I nodded, and disappeared like the wind, giving Dick a tap as I passed; for there is a belief prevalent in his mind, that whoso succeeds in depositing the "last touch" has the pre-eminence.

Not the striking of a single quarter of an hour, did I miss hearing all that night; and I had been dressed for hours, when Dick opened his eyes upon my excited face.

"Is it you, Jean? Isn't it very early?"

"Very, dear. Jump up; I think you forget we are going to Bundoran."

"No, I don't forget," he said, rising slowly to kiss me. "How glad you are!"

Glad! I should think so. My feet were never still until Dick and I had taken our seats opposite the old ladies in the big brougham. Very unexpectedly, then, Mrs. Cortley began to speak to me; and very difficult I found it, as we drove along (though we always drive so slowly), to hear the soft voice, which is daily growing more low and subdued as her deafness increases.

"I think you understand, Miss Royes, that this is to be a holiday for Dick; but I hope you will keep him under your care and supervision just as usual. To-morrow I expect his cousin Arthur to join us, and he used to be very fond of exciting the child. He may still have the same inclination, though I hear he is very much changed lately—of course by his father's death—and I shall not be comfortable unless I can feel sure that you are always with Dick."

"I think I am always with Dick," I said, smiling a little.

"I hope Arthur will not disturb my quiet household," resumed Mrs. Cortley, glancing towards Crannigan, as if she were already tired of addressing me; "but at any rate Miss Royes can prevent Dick helping him. I should not like my poor little grandson, who has nothing to depend on but his own talents, to grow up random, or fond of amusement."

My conscience pricked me guiltily on the score of my own randomness, and fondness for amusement; but I remembered comfortingly that Dick does not certainly carry either sin to excess.

"I am sure you will forward this wish of mine, Miss Royes?"

I, being addressed again, answered that I would try.

"Dick is fond of you, I observe," continued Mrs. Cortley, in her measured tones, "and I am quite satisfied that he should be so."

This was so much more considerate a speech than I was accustomed to—and tears seem so near one's eyes when one's

heart is filled with a great joy—that mine started at her words.

“I will try to deserve his fondness,” I said very earnestly, “by being patient and careful in the help I give him.”

Then she lay back in her corner, and said no more.

What a funny journey we had! Mr. Ruskin must have overlooked it when he said that we no longer travel, we arrive at places. Yesterday we emphatically spent in travelling. After the long, stiff, closed-in drive into Enniskillen, what a treat it seemed to find ourselves on board the little steamer which was to take us down Lough Erne, and which—as the handbills expressly stated—ruled the waves! I had read this in the morning on the impregnable Enniskillen walls; yet—as we glided smoothly on among the small wooded islands which rose dark and rich out of the silvery water (and of which, they say, the lake has one for every day in the year)—it was borne in upon me that its sway was a sinecure: there were no waves to rule.

“Isn’t it beautiful? Oh! Oliver, isn’t it beautiful?” I cried, as we glided past the mountainous shore, the little vessel skimming daintily over the sunstreaked water.

“Which of these is Robinson Crusoe’s island?” asked Dick, while we leant together over the side of the boat. And when I showed him one with a little cabin on it, we were both entirely satisfied.

Presently Dick nestled beside me on the seat, and his little head grew heavy on my shoulder. I recalled the assertion of the bills. If the steamer did not exactly rule the waves, she felt them considerably. If *they* did not exactly feel her sway, we did. “We are in the broad lake now,” Dick said, rousing himself uncomfortably. His pale little face was growing green; I put him to lie on the seat, with his head in my lap; and then I found that I was feeling much less comfortable than usual.

“Go downstairs a bit,” said Crannigan, emerging from the low doorway, “and take something to eat. The pastry is good.”

I could not venture to disturb Dick, and my own soul recoiled from cabinic atmosphere at such a moment; doubly recoiled when that atmosphere was imbued with pastry.

At Belleek, where we landed, a novel scene presented itself to my English eyes. A row of extraordinary vehicles stood ready to convey us on to Bundoran, and every driver was talking rapidly at the top of his voice, and wearing himself out by gestures. Foremost in the line stood a kind of Black Hole of Calcutta on wheels, from the innermost corner of which I was, after a time, aware that Crannigan was beckoning to me. The long line of open Irish cars, which I was watching (where the passengers sat on two long seats, their backs against the luggage, piled alarmingly high down the middle), are far more enticing to me.

I popped my head in at the dungeon door, and asked if Dick and I might go in one of the outside cars. We might, Crannigan said, if we did not mind "who we sat by." From which speech I inferred that the attractive machine, on whose threshold I was standing, was reserved for the aristocracy.

We sat next no one worse than a corpulent priest, who laughed a great deal, and cracked many broad jokes across the luggage, with a very small priest on the opposite side—I have never yet seen quite a middle-sized Irish priest.

I enjoyed that drive excessively. I am very glad there is no railway yet; we should not have seen half so much; nothing at all, perhaps, of the quaint little town of Ballyshannon, whose High Street looks almost as perpendicular as the sides of these cliffs, and in whose narrow, odorous back streets, bare-legged, bare-headed girls stood about, deftly working in horsehair, and offering us brooches, bracelets, and necklets of it in scarlet, black, and white. The lake grew into the sea; the evening ocean-wind blew on my eager face. Dick pointed out the landmarks of Bundoran. The car turned out of the principal street, up to Brighton Terrace, which is a row of twelve small white houses built sideways on a cliff; in front of which, beyond the drive, stretches a long sandy green, where, of course, croquet is established. I stood at the door while our luggage was taken in, and looked down upon the town on my left; and the sea lay before me beyond that slip of croquet lawn; and far away on my right beyond the Downs, which Mrs. Cortley's chair is just now leaving.

Now Dick and I are going in, descending the rock cautiously. What a night it is! It almost seems unnatural to go indoors.

"Won't we climb about and enjoy ourselves to-morrow, Oliver?"

On the croquet-ground a brilliant group has gathered, and light young laughter reaches Dick and me, as we slowly open the gate into the terrace. Girls in bright picturesque dresses stand about upon the grass, while young men saunter among them. Not so intent are they upon the hoops as upon the looks and acts of their companions; not so much amused by the game as by the jesting words which pass among them. One especially I notice, a fair little girl with beautiful Irish eyes, and not a bit of Irish *brusquerie*; so small, and so lightly dressed, that she looks fairy-like in the dreamy twilight. A girl whose age must be about my own age, but whose face is fresh and uncare-lined, as a girl's face should be.

"Eunice, come in, my darling!" calls a lady's voice from the window next to ours.

And the girl, throwing down her mallet, runs lightly past me, and springs up the steps.

"Oh! do stay longer, Eunice!" cry the eager voices she has left.

But she only turns at the door, shaking her head; and in a moment I see her at the open window, beside the lady who has called her, holding up her face for a kiss.

"Jean, you aren't so glad as you were, are you? What are you thinking?"

"I fancied the mist was creeping towards us. Run in, dear."

My room is on the ground-floor, close beside the entrance-door, and beside mine is a little bed for Dick. It seems very funny, but the houses are arranged so, and we cannot afford to lose a room.

Dick lies asleep now, with two fingers tight in his mouth; and I put out my light, and move aside the blind for a minute, before I begin to undress. The drawing-room windows are still wide open next door, and the lamplight falls upon the grass in two bright squares. A gentleman stands in one of these, and rippling laughter and gay words fall round him with the cheery light. Our house is closed and quiet for the night, and a gray mist has fallen, like a heavy sleep, upon the town; but many of the rooms are bright and noisy still, and out upon the terraced steps are passing to and fro, now sauntering or listless, now quick or light. There will be brilliant moonlight nights before we leave. Shall I have to spend them all shut in with Dick?

I drop the blind, and kiss the little sleeping face repentantly. There are some to whom there is not given the love of even one child-heart.

Captain Arthur is exactly like his picture—or I suppose I ought to say his picture is exactly like him. Yesterday morning, when Dick and I were wandering over the flat, slippery coast of rock which stretches so far out to sea at low water (Dick carrying a basket of highly fanciful manufacture, in which he now and then deposited a discovered treasure of the deep, for which he gropes and grovels, as many older and wiser people spend their whole days here in doing), he gave one of his quiet little starts. "Oh, Jean, there's Arthur!"

But he was too shy to leave me, and the gentleman came up to us. I forget exactly how he did it, but in five minutes he made me feel as if I had known him before, and as if he knew me quite well. Not before, since I was a little child, has any one talked to me as if he *knew* me. We walked on together, planning expeditions, jumping from rock to rock, laughing at each other's slips, standing out on the slimy sea-weed, until the tide came bounding in and laughing at us; when we sprang back and laughed at it, our hands and faces wet with spray. How full of life and beauty the sea looked. I could have stayed and watched it so for hours; but Captain Arthur had come to take us

in to lunch, and so we had to leave it. Not for long, though. In the afternoon we went to the cliffs, and sat there all the long bright hours, idly chatting and watching the waves, which are not "sad sea-waves" at all, nor provocative of sadness. But very soon, it seemed to me, we had to leave again.

"If I had my own way," said Captain Arthur, rising unwillingly, "I would discard stated meal-times at the sea-side. They always come when you least want them."

"I want my dinner by no means least," I answered, rising willingly.

"I know you have never given it a single thought," he said, quizzically.

"Then you would not be convinced, if I told you you were mistaken."

"And you are really glad to go in?" he asked, looking into my face rather intently.

"Of course I am," I answered, ready to pinch my own cheeks, because the colour rose in them. "I have a most provokingly exacting appetite, Captain Arthur."

But we went in very slowly, for all that.

Since then it has seemed to me that we have been always together—we three. Dick has a quiet, undemonstrative fondness for his cousin, and thoroughly appreciates his inability to ask geographical, historical, or arithmetical problems at meal-times; for he was very glad to confide to me to-day (to my great relief) that "Arthur doesn't even know the twices."

Two weeks we have been here already. How happily the time is passing! I can hardly believe it is my own voice that I hear so joyously upon the rocks, through those long bright hours which we spend, as Captain Arthur says, between sitting and flitting. For two whole weeks I have forgotten to recite in character, or talk to myself; for two whole weeks life has held me in a delicious embrace, and smiled a warm, bright, loving smile upon me. A strange new consciousness is dawning within me, which I dare not own, even to myself. Is it only because his grandmother is so silent and unsociable that Captain Arthur always strays to us wherever we may be; and goes with us wherever we may go? Is it because Dick is more amusing than poor fidgetty Cramnigan? Or is it because what my own heart sometimes whispers, in proud and humble surprise, is really growing to be true? His is a tender, honourable nature, and I think—I think that unless he really meant—

Sometimes I fancy how it would be, to reign in a happy, loving home of my own; to be cared for, loved, and cherished; and to care for, love, and cherish in return—deeply, as I feel I have within me the power to do. The hot blood is mounting into my cheeks as I write; but no one will see either the words or the blush, so it

does not matter, except that blushing is an uncomfortable sensation. I wonder—if ever such a wild, sweet dream could come true—whether I could make him happy? Just while I wonder it, my heart has the answer ready, and I *know* I could. I know it. I laugh now at his tender wooing words, because, if I did not laugh, I should sob out my joy; and I want him to know me better, before he thinks I understand him, and so feels bound to me. But though I laugh, I shall answer from my heart at last, as I could answer from my heart this moment, and humbly take the joy he gives me. I know how I love him, because, though I am so weary of this life I have been living (so doubly weary shall I be after standing on the threshold of so bright and sweet a one!), I could turn to it again far, far more gladly than I could bear that he should love me, if it were not to be for his happiness. Oh, I hope that is no idle speech!

Dick calls me out to see the crescent moon. I must not see it first through the glass, he says, and there is Captain Arthur waiting. And so we stroll on, looking now and then at the golden crescent in the heavens, and saying that, before we leave, we shall have glorious moonlight nights. Dick's little face, at my side, grows so dim and indistinct that I begin to notice how swiftly the twilight is darkening, and take him in, while Captain Arthur paces slowly up and down before the door. When he thinks I have been long enough, he taps upon the window, and asks if I am coming out again.

"No, not again."

I hear him hang his hat in the hall, and go upstairs; and when I follow, he has the chess-board arranged at the window, and two seats ready. I take one laughing, and we begin to play. Mrs. Cortley is soundly asleep, Crannigan nodding unsoundly. Our two heads are very near each other in the open window, and the lamplight and the Summer twilight meet upon them.

Captain Arthur, not having anything to say which would benefit the public, whispers to me as we play; I, feeling the stillness of the room within, and the quiet of the world without, answer him, when I answer him at all, in the same tone. Crannigan turns over in her low chair, with a heavy, sleepy sigh.

"Don't mind whispering," she says, resignedly, "even if we were asleep, which we are not, your voices are less disturbing aloud than in whispers."

The words die off in an odd little gasp, which Captain Arthur calls a snorelet, and we laugh softly, while he muses upon his next move. He is making it very deliberately, when a large open carriage rolls under our windows, and stops at the next door. It is full of young people—six or seven of them crowded in. They all jump lightly down, and the carriage turns and leaves them standing there, talking before they separate. I think they have

been to a pic-nic, for they are all dressed gaily; and standing there in the gloaming, they look to me like a group of characters from some picturesque old play.

"Captain Arthur," I say, quietly, "how pretty Irish girls are generally!"

"Generally, eh? Check."

"But just look out, will you?"

"All right," he returns, his eyes upon my king.

"And what do you think of them?"

He answers, with a suppressed impatience in his lazy words, that they look excessively like prize bouquets in a flower-show—about the stiffest things he knows that have any claim to prettiness.

"Not the little girl in white," I say; "there is nothing stiff about her. I mean Ivin, who lives next door. Does not she look beautiful to-night?"

"You never think of your own danger," he says, flashing a look past the window straight up into my face. "Check, I say."

"You never will see her, when I ask you," I complain. "Why is it?"

"Perhaps because it is *you* who show her to me, Jean."

He says it very low, bending over the chess-board, and I move at random, with burning cheeks.

There are only two bathing-machines here, and they are perched in two crannies of the cliffs, a good way from the sea, where they look as if they had been tossed in by the tide one day, and had stuck against the rock, like limpets. These two machines, with their amphibious proprietors, are in great request in the early mornings; though, for every one person who uses them, half-a-dozen exhibit a lofty independence of such aids, and bathe from the little nooks and caves along the shore. Every morning I gaze at the sea, which is fresh and enticing, and determine that I will bathe *that day*; but every morning I gaze at the machines, which are not fresh or enticing, and determine that I will not bathe *that day*.

After the formation of that last resolve, I sit down on the cliffs above the machines, to wait with Crannigan until Biddy is ready for her. Captain Arthur is staying with his grandmother on the sands, where her chair is fixed, and he has kept Dick with him. As we sit there, Miss Ivin passes us, running down the slippery steps which lead to the shore. Crannigan strains her neck to look after the little vanishing figure, and I ask inquisitively why; for, somehow, this girl has a strange fascination for me—a fascination which grows upon me every time I see her.

"I always feel a bit of a curiousness in her," Crannigan answers, "because of her having been engaged to Captain Arthur."

"What!"

The word seems to start from me by no will of mine.

"She was sure enough, though they were disengaged after. Has he never told you that then, after all the walks you've taken together?"

"Never, never."

"Then it puzzles me, Miss Royes, to guess all you can have to say to each other. But engaged they were, as I say. She's very rich, that little Miss Ivin; the only child, and a mighty deal thought of by her relations. Pretty, too, she's called; but she looks to me a good deal fallen off since they quarrelled."

"They quarrelled, then?"

A cool fresh breeze touches us, as it wanders in from the sea, but my eyes burn, and my mouth is dry and hot.

"Well, it was something of the kind. Captain Cortley had always been bent upon his son marrying a fortune; as he ought, surely, for his grandmother is safe to live many a year yet; a life that's been as important as hers isn't likely to be cut off soon. The poor dear gentleman, whose relic she is, lived to turn his ninetieth year, and she's sure to do it too. He thought, very properly, that any young man who's worth anything, ought to court 'proputtty,' and he held out every introduction to his son to do it, for he was always afraid Captain Arthur wouldn't care about marrying money. But he did, and fell as deep as you like in love with Miss Eunice, and she with him too; for, bless ye, girls don't often let all the reciprocity be on one side. She was just as bewitched as he was; and Master Arthur—I mean this one's father—was delighted about the engagement. Well, I don't know how it happened, but it was all broken off; and really the suddenness of it quite laid me down, for just at that time I was severely threatened with my rheumatism. I've often tried to grasp the truth by asking Captain Arthur himself, but he never vouchsafed me any sensible response, so I left off. If *he* did it—and she with all that 'proputtty'—he deserves to suffer; and they say it *was* him. Now I must go."

"Do you think—do you think he fell in love with her for— for her money's sake?" I ask, detaining her with my hand.

"I expect so."

"Perhaps after his father's death he did not care about the wealth?"

"Very likely: he's of an indifferent character."

"And so broke the engagement off?"

"Maybe. Come, I shall lose my machine."

"But—but does he seem to you to be as happy now as he was then?"

"Just the same, as far as I can see. He never was a rioter or a scrapegrace."

Once more the sea is bright and sparkling, and the waves dance in cheerily. They are laughing with me at Crannigan's words, and repeating, with merry sarcasm, the one which is so powerful with her, and whose rhythm was so pleasant to the Northern farmer: "Proputty, proputty." It is not so powerful a word, after all, they say; and I know that there is another, shorter, but far sweeter, and far, far more powerful; a word that lies low down in my glad heart, but which, even from there, casts a radiance over all my world.

From the little wooden dressing-room below me, issues Crannigan, robed in a long gauze burnous, which hangs limply about her, and carefully carrying an umbrella over what appears to be a shining brown bald head. On the edge of the long green pool in the rocks, which she has selected for her bathing-place, she relinquishes the cloak and umbrella, and stands revealed in dark-blue flannel bathing-gown, and a pair of huge goloshes, tied on with white strings. The shining surface of her head I find to be a peculiar close covering of oilskin. I watch her step into the placid green water, and curtsy faintly two or three times. When Biddy jumps in to join her, I see her seize the woman's two hands, as if delighted to welcome a fellow-creature in the incongruous element. I observe that Biddy has some more glorious achievement in view. Then I stroll on, to where I know that some one will presently come and find me.

The sea is grand to-night; so, while the sun drops slowly towards it, we start to the Fairy Bridges.

"We will watch the sun setting from there," Captain Arthur says; "and Dick shall not come, because we may be late."

It is very, very beautiful. The white foam rushes up, and darts over the edge of the gigantic cliff, with a sound mighty and yet subdued. It dances before our eyes with sudden, rapid gaiety; then drops again with slow and leisurely grace, dream-like and unreal as some wonderful spirit from the sea.

"Are these the fairies that haunt and name the place?" I ask.

The sun flashes its crimson light along the waters; the clouds are like long streaks of burnished gold. I stand upright, almost upon the edge of the cliff, trembling in the very gladness of my heart. Such an evening can fully repay four years of toil!

"Will you not sit down, Jean?" asks Captain Arthur from his low seat on the grass, looking up at me with an amused smile in his eyes.

"Presently. I want to remember this, that I may bring it back when I sit in the old apple-tree at home."

He laughs.

"Why there?"

"Because it will be harder to bring it back on Winter nights, as I stare into the school-room fire."

"And those are your chief quarters, are they? But why should you need to bring it back? You shall see many more beautiful sights than this."

A flush rises in his face as he says this rather rapidly. I feel the answering colour rise in mine.

"I never could," I say, quietly.

"You could, dear Jean, and shall, if you will come with me to seek them."

He has risen now, and come close to me. My heart beats almost aloud, but I speak with easy coolness.

"Please to sit down again."

He slips down on the rock below me, and leans back, laughing up into my face.

"What an unexpected and very chilling rebuff! What do you mean by it, Jeanie?"

"You shut out my view when you stand. We could not see this place in a more beautiful aspect, could we?"

"I could."

"It is my fixed opinion that you are never satisfied, Captain Cortley."

"I hope to be so presently," he says, very gently. "Have we not had a pleasant time here, Jean?"

My lips begin to shake, and my eyes to fill.

"Yes—rather."

"That *rather* was added in pure sauciness. Do you get many pleasant times in your year?"

"Yes."

He looks incredulous at this, though it is said conclusively.

"Being an angel," he says, smiling, "my visits to my grandmother have been few and far between. I would have come often, and tried to make it a little cheerier for you, Jean—I would indeed," he ends, very earnestly, "if I had known."

"If you had known what?"

A laugh breaks over his lips.

"If I had known how very pleasant it would have been for myself."

"Oh!"

"I shall follow you very soon, Jean, because now I shall know that the old house holds what is dearest to me on earth."

"Crannigan?" I say, composedly.

"Certainly," he answers, in the same tone. "What do you think of my choice of a wife?"

"A bad one," I say, my face all flaming.

"Why?"

"She has *my* failing—poverty."

"Poverty!" he echoes. "Is that the failing of my chosen wife? That's right, Jean—that's right, dear. I can give her wealth for poverty."

The sparkling foam leaps round me; but it is not that which dazzles my eyes. Within those golden gates beyond the sea, a world of brilliance seems to open for me, and bewilder me with tremulous joy. But, while my pulses throb, I laugh a light laugh down into the earnest, upturned face.

"Take my word for it, Sammy, the poor in a loomp is bad."

While I speak, there is an answering laugh in his eyes. Before he has time to answer, a group of people pass near us, and we are silent until they turn out of sight. A little figure, straying behind the others, comes up now, sauntering leisurely, one hand full of wild-flowers. She does not guess our presence until she is close beside me, when suddenly a great aching look comes into the bright face, and I can read the pain it bears.

Captain Arthur does not see her. His head is not raised now, but turned to the sea, and his hat is low over his eyes, for the warm red light is dazzling. She is twenty yards away now.

"Captain Arthur," I whisper, "a lady passed close to us, and must have heard us talking. Look who it is."

"Heard us!" He turns in quick vexation, and, with dreadful sudden slowness, the smile that had lingered dies on his lips. I, looking down upon him, see his whole face blanch pitifully; even his lips are deathly white; and I feel very, very glad his eyes are hidden.

Nothing has happened, except that a great cloud floats down between me and the golden glory of the evening sky.

They were playing "In Sweetest Harmony" when we went into church this morning; and while I was wondering whether Handel would have recognised it, the pew-opener came to select us from the flock (and herd) within the door, and take us softly up the matted aisle. There had come into the assembly a man in a gold ring and goodly apparel, and he must be led to the uppermost seats. I followed him respectfully, and Dick followed me, for the two old ladies had been sitting for fully forty minutes in that seat close to the pulpit. The woman stopped, and laid a benign hand on the open door of an uppermost seat, holding her head high and her eyes afar off, as is the manner of pew-openers, while we passed in. The harmonium gasped a little; "In Sweetest Harmony" subsided into sweeter silence, and what Captain Arthur calls the involuntary was over. Standing up then, my eyes straying a little, I noticed, near the door of the pew in front of me, a shining mass of bright fair hair, and caught a sight, too

of a small sweet face under the veriest little mockery of a bonnet. I tried to look away from it ; I tried to follow the words of the service ; I tried to glance down at Captain Arthur, who stood so tall and still close to the door of our pew, exactly behind her. But I could not do either. The pure little face haunted me. The words sighed round the building without entering my heart, and I had not courage to meet Captain Arthur's eyes.

"A good sermon, I should fancy," observed Mrs. Cortley, in her soft, hushed voice, as Captain Arthur helped her to her chair ; "but I did not manage to hear it very well."

Poor old lady ! it is years and years since she "managed to hear" a sermon very well ; yet she is always there, and who is to say what speechless good her heart receives ?

"No wonder you did not hear, Mrs. Cortley," I said, promptly, and truthfully to-day. "I did not hear a single word."

"*Didn't* you ?" asked Dick. "Oh, I heard 'Jacob' quite plain."

"Did you really, Dick ?" inquired Captain Arthur, laughing heartily. "What a little pitcher you must be ! I heard nothing distinctly except the harmonium, and I felt inclined to offer my earthly all for permission to groan aloud, or put in the stops." His eyes turned away suddenly. "Dick, there is a seal down there. Come and see. We won't be a couple of minutes."

They went off together ; the Bath-chair rolled slowly away ; down the churchyard walked Eunice Ivin, with two other girls, who left her at the gate. This was the chance I wanted. I walked along the street exactly before her, and presently my little crimson prayer-book fell in the dusty road.

"Excuse me—" a young, pleasant voice was speaking to me — "you have dropped your book, I think."

"Mine ? No, surely not mine."

I asked it very coolly, but my hand shook stupidly when I took it from her and slowly opened it, seeking the name.

"Will you wait one moment, while I look if it is mine ?"

She was walking on beside me, as I had intended she should, and I talked on as I turned the leaves. Yes, it *was* mine, I discovered, after some little research, and I was so glad she had happened to see it. I had dropped it once before, but fortunately Dick had found it. It was certainly not doomed to be lost. Was she coming my way ? She had no choice left her then, and we two walked on together. I do not know what we said ; I only felt that my end was gained. We can never again meet as utter strangers. As I turned from bidding her good-bye, Captain Arthur came up with Dick, but he passed us without a word, and went into the house. Since then, though, I think he has been even more kind and loving than before.

Captain Arthur is engaged for a day's fishing at Bundrowse, but before he starts he orders a jaunting-car, to take Dick and me to the landslip. I hardly know how it happens, except that I am so determined about it, but I get Eunice to come with us. I tell her I am timid about taking Dick alone to the mountains. I tell her I have no friend whom I can ask to go with me. I entreat her with painful earnestness, and at last, half laughing at me, she consents.

I leave word for the car to follow us, and walk on with Eunice and Dick. Now that my aim is achieved, I feel timid and nervous—more so the more I try to shake it off. It is a beautiful morning—"too beautiful to last," Eunice says, as we look up into the unfathomable blue. We have an hour's start of the car, so we walk lazily, in no hurry for its arrival, it is so pleasant to walk against this soft, caressing wind.

Dick carries a parcel in his hand, on the contents of which we intend to regale later on. Suddenly comes from him a pathetic little cry.

"Oh! Jean, look there!"

Looking there, I find that a juvenile Paddy has dexterously abstracted the parcel of cakes from Dick's hand, and is whistling deliberately as he saunters down the street. I turn, and reach him panting.

"Mebbe ye'r ladyship's looking for a lad as stole the little un's tarts? Ah, sure y'are. Well, he's running yonder. See him!"

The audacious little rascal points to an unoffender who is on his way harmlessly to the shore; but as I can see the broken pastry crammed into a ragged pocket under my very eyes, and feel that it would be difficult for us to refresh ourselves on the dirt in which it is embedded, I return discomfited. The hearty laugh over this breaks the ice on my voice, and we go on cheerfully. The river lies before us now, the broad, shallow, rippling river, which says, as plainly as watery lips can speak, "Come and wade." We cross the dusty bridge, then seat ourselves upon a low stone wall on the roadside, to wait for the car.

"We had better not loiter," the driver says, as we take our seats; "in fact, though it is fine enough so furr, the clouds make for the Bray's face."

"If we had been wise," adds Eunice, "we should have brought our waterproofs; they would have been no trouble."

We are such a light weight (if that isn't Irish), that the car jolts rather unpleasantly, yet we enjoy our six or seven miles' drive too, and are almost surprised to find it over so soon. We put ourselves under professional guidance, and ascend the mountain. How we enjoy it, all three of us! I don't know which is most eager and excited; I know which is least so, though, and

that is Dick. At first it is only strolling lazily up a smooth green slope, beside which there lies the dry cradle of a little mountain stream. After we have left this, and reached the rocks, I fancy it is like climbing in Switzerland ; and Eunice says it is, and tells us some of her adventures there. And now the guide points out to us the (in this part of the world) celebrated Slip in the Mountains. We stand in the rent which is left by the severance of the rock—a narrow pass, on either side of which a wall of rock, smooth as glass, rises to a giddy height—and the narrow opening in front framed a most perfect little picture. We stand entranced for so long that, when we turn to the opposite opening again, we see the clouds hang heavily a long way below us. The coming down is best of all, I think, as we start. The climbing had been slow and wearisome work, with one's back to the view and one's breath short ; but the coming down is magnificent—the fresh mountain wind in our faces, the wide prospect before us, and the difficulties worth battling with. I hold Dick tightly by the hand, partly because he holds me, and partly because I am afraid to trust his little lingering feet. In one place the guide has to make stairs for us with his hands. In one place he tries to frighten us by saying that, because we walk so free-like on the Bray, he has brought us this way, where the view is best ; but one false step here would be certain death.

We are in the safe part again now, and we stand a moment resting ; taking our hats off to let the wind blow against our hot faces. I, with Dick in my hand, challenge Eunice to a race, but the guide interferes. "There are odd stumbly places still," he says ; "it would not be safe to run." Dick's face is turned up to the sky, his hat in his hand.

"Jean, I felt one great big spot of rain," he says.

Eunice puts on her hat hastily.

"A storm in these mountains is terrible," she says. "Come quickly down."

I raise my face incredulously, and a heavy drop falls on my lips. A long time after, as it seems, another drops lazily on my eyelid. They seem to come singly, and so far apart that I smile into Dick's anxious face. But by the time my hat is on, and his hand tight in mine again, they are falling quick and straight, and the clouds are gathering down upon us.

Shall he take the little gentleman in his arms ? the guide asks. But Dick clings the closer to me.

"Keep beside that young lady," I entreat him ; "and let us see you before us, that we may follow."

They go on in front ; but it is such slow and difficult work, now that we are walking through the blinding clouds, that sometimes they leave us far behind, and sometimes, though they may be close to us, we cannot see them at all. The thunder rolls among

the rocks behind us ; rolls down after us as we hurry on, and, passing, its angry sound is lost in the distance.

"Jean," shudders Dick, his two hands clutching my fingers, "oh! isn't it almighty?"

And before I answer, he has let me go, and is kneeling in the soaked grass, his hands raised and folded. I cannot stop his involuntary prayer. I stand and wait until he rises. Then he takes my hand again, and we feel our way on against the blinding rain. The lightning flashes terribly across our path; Dick's breath comes heavily, but he does not answer me a word when I attempt to encourage him.

"The foot of the hill cannot be far away now, Dick; and I can see the others in front."

Among the rocks above us peals the thunder, crashing from corner to corner of the mountain with its mighty reverberation; and again Dick falls upon his knees. Again I cannot stop him, and stand helplessly gazing at the little wet, rapt face, until he rises, and starts on again in nervous haste.

"It is better for us not to loiter here, Dick," I say, gently; "and we shall be home all the sooner."

The little hand in mine tightens, but no words come. I fancy the guide is calling to us, but my feeble answer is lost amid the mightier sounds. I think the rain is slackening a little, and I am just going to tell Dick so, when it suddenly gathers all its strength, and comes down upon us in a solid sheet of water. In its first rush it blinds me, but I feel Dick's hand slip from mine; and then I can see the little saturated figure kneel again, with upturned head, from which the rain falls drearily.

"Oh! Dick, my dear, my dear, you must not stay!"

But I may as wisely speak to the quick lightning flash that darts before my eyes. I can only wait until he rises. Then once more, hand in hand, we grope our way. The flashes, following each other quickly now, show me how the rain pours down the green hillside, like a shallow, restless river. In the bed of the stream—which had been dry as he went up—the water dashes with a low deep rush, which is plainly heard through all the grander sounds. I cry to Dick to keep his feet firm and sure, and to hold me tightly; but no answering word comes back from him. Through all the storm, I think I hear a faint and far-off cry. Perhaps the guide is shouting loudly to us, but it comes up to me as a very whisper. The black clouds are torn apart again, and the fire, straight from heaven rolls, down the wet, green way before us. One rapid thunder-clap seems to shiver the rocks behind us.

"No, no," I cry, wildly and authoritatively, for Dick has dropped my hand again, and has his own locked high above his head. I stoop and throw my wet arms round him, and the little

face, white as death falls on my shoulder. In the quick fierce light, some one springs up the slope, and catches Dick in one arm. For a moment the other arm is thrown round me, but I draw back; and with a little cry of relief and gratitude, I hurry down the hill at Captain Arthur's side.

In the shadow of the stormy mountain, there nestles a comfortable little cabin, and into this he goes, with Dick in his arms.

There is a smouldering turf fire on the ground, and the guide is trying, with his mouth, to blow it into a blaze. At the farther end of the desolate little kitchen, Eunice stands by the window, looking at the murky sky through its patched panes. I join her slowly, my wet dress trailing behind me over the uneven stones.

"Miss Ivin, what can I do to prevent your taking cold from this? Oh! how I blame myself for bringing you!"

"I was mad, I think, to come," she says; but I know she is not thinking of the rain.

Captain Arthur, in his mackintosh, Dick's head still lying on his shoulder, comes up to me. I am close to Eunice, but she need not be within a hundred miles, for all the notice that he takes of her.

"It seems that there is no woman belonging to this cottage, Miss Royes. There is no chance either of drying your dresses or of procuring others. I brought rugs and waterproofs on my car, which is waiting, for I felt a storm was coming. What do you say? Had we not better go back at once?"

"It would be far safer," I say, looking at Dick; then I turn to Eunice. "I am so very much afraid that Miss Ivin will catch cold."

She has come in a muslin dress, with nothing extra over it. Captain Arthur's eyes cannot help following mine, and when he sees her standing so, drearily soaked, her small face white and pained, a strange look flits across his eyes—a look of fearful yearning. Perhaps he feels it there, for he bends down and looks at Dick while he speaks again.

"It will be best and safest to make haste home. I dismissed your car, for the man was in a sorry plight and temper. You must stop one moment, though, and take the dose I prescribe."

The guide has brought out a chubby little stone bottle, and in two minutes we are all imbibing the great Irish national beverage, whiskey-punch. I have never tasted it before; I hope I need never taste it again.

The car comes round from somewhere under cover, and Captain Arthur draws the rugs and cloaks, one by one, out of the well of it, burying Dick in his own invernness, and fixing him in a corner of one seat. Then he holds a cloak for me. It is Mrs. Cortley's long blue waterproof, and I take it from his hand and wrap it

round Eunice, enveloping her from top to toe. Moving a little, Captain Arthur turns half round to her.

"I must lift you, Miss Ivin, I suppose. Here, beside Dick, if you please."

I come between them coolly, in my gray tweed, which does not half cover me—and no wonder, not having been bought this year, or the year before, or the year before that.

"I must sit by Dick, please. Would you object to the other side, Miss Ivin?"

I do not venture to look at Captain Arthur as I say it; but I see his outstretched hand shake a little. He ties a shawl over my head, in an excessively unbecoming manner, and tucks a great rug well round me; then he smiles into my almost hidden face.

"Take care of yourself, as well as of Dick."

I do not turn when he is on the other side assisting Eunice; and when, after taking his seat beside her, he leans upon the wall between us, and tries to talk to me, I tell him I am too stiffly pinioned to turn an atom, and so keep my head away. I have again achieved what I wish. They surely cannot sit together there in silence all the way home, as they sit now. I watch the rain growing more and more gentle in its fall; I watch the trees rustle their brightened leaves delightedly; I count the cabins we pass; I guess whether we shall next meet a man or a woman, and wait anxiously to see if I am right. I listen steadily while our driver, forgetting his natural politeness in a desire to make himself as comfortable as possible in unpleasantly moist circumstances, sings softly to himself. I learn the words without difficulty, and quietly sing them with him.

"Oh, I care not for the thistle,
And I care not for the rose;
For when the cold winds whistle
Neither down nor crimson shows.
But like hope to him that's friendless,
Where no gaudy flower is seen,
By our graves, with love that's endless,
Waves our own true-hearted green."

That is all; and I should think I repeat it with him half-a-dozen times, hardly knowing what the words mean. Once or twice Dick speaks to me timidly, but I dare not trust myself to turn to him when I answer. I am closing my eyes upon the fading light and beauty of my life.

Crannigan is at the door, as we drive up to Brighton-terrace. Captain Arthur's side of the car is next her, and she seizes Eunice.

"Come in at once," she says; "we have fires ready for you. Come in, for this is most dangerous. I think Mrs. Ivin has been kept at some friend's house through the storm—at any rate,

she is not at home, so you must come in. Don't stay out here, any of you, unless you want your deaths."

There is a good fire in my bedroom, and Eunice and I change our dresses there at once—I talking merrily, she very silent.

Crannigan is rather hurriedly putting Dick to bed; she does not care to be away from her mistress, even for this little time. They have brought Eunice in a soft delicate pink dress, and when she puts it on, and brushes out her rich fair hair—leaving it down because it has been so wet, only knotting back the locks on her temples—my eyes grow dim and aching. She is so pretty, so very, very pretty; and I am taking her up to Captain Arthur. He, no sign of rain about him now, stands looking out upon the brightening sky. I see him start a little when Eunice stops at the same window, but he does not speak while we describe our adventures. But when we sit down to our dinner tea—Eunice on his right hand, I far away on the other side, beyond Crannigan—he rouses himself, and talks rather fast and nervously. We have what any one would call a gay meal, but the gaiety is kept up solely by Captain Arthur and myself; while in my heart I am longing to be beside Dick in my silent room.

"Where is your provokingly exacting appetite?" he asks, quizzically, looking at my plate.

He looks at me perpetually this evening—just as if he were afraid of looking elsewhere.

"Here," I answer, lightly, "but satisfied for the present."

"Yet you have tasted nothing since breakfast, but mountain breezes and soft water."

Tea is over, and I am glad to rise without answering. For a long time we stand about the windows, doing and saying almost nothing. We are all getting very tired of it, when Mrs. Cortley, in her weak voice, asks Eunice to sing. A tired look creeps into the girl's eyes, but she goes to the piano at once; little guessing, I daresay, what a wretched one it is. Her breath comes so fast, as she draws out the stool, that I whisper to her not to mind. She takes no notice of this, and I can see that she has made up her mind to it. The pure, true voice has a strange pathos, which I can hardly bear to hear; but I wait until the song is over, watching the change in Captain Arthur's half-hidden face. Then I creep from the room.

"Jean, Jean," whispers Dick, as I bend over him in the shadowy twilight, "I've so wanted you. Crannigan didn't let me say my prayers."

I take him in my arms, but he shrinks away.

"Draw down the blind, Jean; the top one."

"Why, darling? The little blind is up; no one can see in."

"Please to draw it down, Jean. I ought to have said them before, and the angels will be surprised. Please draw it down."

Smiling at the shame in the innocent little face, I do so at once. No sound of singing comes down from the windows above.

"Jean," Dick whispers, as I kiss the little white cheeks on the pillow, "we won't go to a mountain again, will we?"

"Not yet, dear."

"Oh, but no, no, not at all. Oh, Jean, what a very, very wet place Heaven must be!"

Leaning there beside him, I try to show him how little this is so; and the light creeps slowly from the room. I have heard Eunice leaving, and now that Dick is asleep I go upstairs. Mrs. Cortley and Crannigan must have gone to bed; for when I go into the drawing-room, I find Captain Arthur there alone.

"Jean," he says, holding both his hands to me, when I go towards him to say good night, "don't go yet."

I lay my cold hands in his; I look up frankly and fully into his eyes.

"Why? Do you want to ask me something?"

"Yes; two things."

"And may I ask you two things afterwards?"

"With pleasure, dear. I want to know why you acted so to-day. Why did you take Miss Ivin with you?"

"I wanted company. I had no idea that it would rain, or that you yourself would come and fetch us."

"Of course I came. I never stay away from you longer than I can help, Jean."

My heart is beating wildly; the red is burning in my face. I try to keep the joy of love from rushing into my eyes, as he stands looking down into them. I try to draw my hands away, but I can do neither.

"This is my other question, dear: will you never let any one come between you and me again? Will you be my dear, dear wife?"

The red has all left my face; my eyes grow wide and bewildered in their effort to look frankly and easily still, into his kind brave face.

"Captain Arthur," I say, and my voice is unsteady and unfamiliar, "I cannot read my own heart yet. I want to read it, and I cannot. Will you wait for your answer?"

"How long, Jean? Oh, do not keep me long, my dear!"

"Until the last night we are here—the night before we leave."

I try to think there is no hope in this request, only pity for myself.

"If you wish it so, dear, it shall be. I shall *hope* through my waiting."

"On that last night, I will tell you even without your asking me again. Now I may ask you my questions. Why did you—

don't look angrily at me ; I will never speak of it again—why did you turn from your first love ? ”

Both his voice and his eyes are *very* angry when he answers :

“ I told you I would answer what you asked, and I will. You do not spare me. She believed a lying calumny ; she believed that I—could woo her for—her fortune's sake. Remember, you have promised never to speak of this again.”

“ She never did believe that ; she never could,” I say, coolly. “ What makes you think she did ? ”

“ I know it ; she told me herself,” he answers, with stern, suppressed passion. “ A speech of my father's had been repeated to her as mine. The mistake was easily made, our names being the same ; but *she* might have known. However, she believed it. What need to argue how she could ? ”

“ And you parted bitterly ? ”

“ Bitterly, of course. How else should we part ? ”

“ And you have been strangers to each other ever since ? ”

“ Strangers, certainly ; and shall be strangers for all time to come. It is better so.”

As he says that, a quick, wild joy throbs in my pulses. *Is it better so ?*

“ There is another question,” I say, very slowly. “ Shall you never ask her of this ? never ask her if she meant what you think ? never give her the opportunity of telling you the truth—an opportunity she could hardly make for herself ? ”

“ She has told the truth before. I have no desire for its repetition.”

“ Will you *never* speak to her again—not even once—as you must have spoken so many, many times ? ”

“ Never ! ” he returns, a quick, hot passion in his eyes, which dies as quickly as it rises, and leaves them very sad and unsatisfied. “ I have sworn never to speak so to her again of my own accord ; and *she* is not very likely to do it. Let her go, Jean. How can you—even you—dare to ask me these things ? You cannot know what an old wound you touch.”

“ Yes ; I think I know,” I whisper, in untold pain. “ Will you try to answer me once more ? You think that the old love is quite, quite dead now ? ”

“ Yes ; oh yes.”

There is a wonderful eagerness in his low reply—an eagerness which falls bitterly on my ears.

“ I have asked all now,” I say, wearily.

“ And you will kindly and pitifully answer my one question at last ? ”

“ Kindly and pitifully, yes.”

“ On the last night ? ” he whispers.

“ On the last night.”

He puts his hands gently on my shoulders, and looks at me with an odd look, that is almost apologetic.

"Dear Jeanie, I will try with all my heart to make you happy."

The waves rush feverishly and impetuously upon the rocks to-night. As I bury my face on my pillow in the darkness, it seems as if they are hurrying me with them. How long is it since I listened, and fancied that they repeated, in laughing scorn, the Northern farmer's cry, "Proputty, proputty!" There was a smaller word, I had said then, which had more power to sway our hearts than *that* could ever have. To-night I feel its strength—in *other* hearts than my own; and I cannot battle with it there, as I can battle with it in my own. Let the pitiful, sadly-bright old dream drift from me on the hurrying tide. And yet—and yet—it tarries still, just here below my hand.

Our last day in Bundoran. How quickly it is passing! One long, bright, sunny smile the sky has worn since sunrise. It is evening now, and Dick is come in to rest. He has not been quite well since our wetting at the Landslip, and is oddly nervous, always looking out for rain, and afraid of venturing beyond the reach of shelter. I have been sitting with him a long time, telling him story after story. Now, that he may rest quietly, I have given him a needle and cotton and some scraps of silk; and he has promised to make me a pincushion. The Bath-chair is coming over the bridge; and Captain Arthur meets it, and walks back beside it. Crannigan is more fidgetty to-day than usual; her rheumatism is threatening her, she says.

The chair stops at the door, and Captain Arthur speaks up to me, without raising his voice. Will I have a little stroll before tea?

"There will be no time," Crannigan puts in; "the tea is ordered early because of Dick" (tea is always ordered early when Crannigan feels any threatening). "Cannot you go after?"

"I think we can," Captain Arthur says, glancing comically at me, as he joins us, and threads Dick's needle for him awkwardly. "It will be a pleasant moonlight night, Jean; a happy moonlight night."

Ah, so it is. A soft caressing moonlight bathes the sea and shore, as I rise from the tea-table, and give one swift eager glance up and down the croquet-ground. There are several loitering figures there. One, very small and childish-looking, is standing apart now, and alone; for the gentleman who has been talking with her, is summoned to arrange a game.

"Where are you going, Jean?" Dick asks before he begins his work.

"To look my last upon the sea. I shall not be long, dear."

Captain Arthur follows me from the room, and takes down his bat.

"I cannot look my last upon the sea if you come, Captain Arthur," I say as lightly as I can; "you are a distracting element."

"This is our last night, Jean," he whispers, looking anxiously into my face. "Do you forget what you are going to tell me?"

"Yes; this is our last night, I answer, my lips trembling a little, "and I do not forget. I am going to the Downs; will you come for me in half an hour?"

"If you would rather that than that I come now."

"Yes, I would."

He looks at his watch, and I go out quietly, shutting the door behind me. Passing Eunice, I speak to her entreatingly:

"I am going to say good-bye to the Atlantic. Do come with me; I am so solitary!"

I think she looks astonished; but she instantly drops the mallet she holds, and turns with me. Side by side, we walk up the terrace and cross the Downs, each of us failing signally in all attempts at conversation.

"You really leave here to-morrow, then?" Eunice says at last, when we have passed a long silence.

"Really. And so I want a last pleasant look at the moonlit sea. I feel, somehow, as if I should never see this wild western coast again."

"Are you going eastward, then, for good?" Eunice asks, with the very faintest little laugh.

"I should like to go as far eastward as possible," I say, slowly; "I think it would be for good."

"I fancy you will live within reach of Bundoran," Eunice continues, glancing nervously at me.

I know what she means, but I say calmly that I suppose Omagh *would* be considered within reach of Bundoran.

"I hope I may see you again some day," she says, kindly and sadly.

"I hope so. I hope you will some day come to Omagh."

No; Eunice does not seem inclined to talk of this. I try another speech.

"We are breaking up our party as well as leaving here, I am sorry to say; Captain Arthur goes to Dublin to-morrow."

No answer.

"It will make a great difference to me."

Because she does not answer, even yet, I have to speak again.

"We shall miss him sorely; he has made it so pleasant here. But I don't think he has been quite happy himself—do you?"

I make that speech a question, to oblige some reply.

"How can I know?"

There is such a thrill of deep-lying sorrow in her voice that I dare not venture to look at her. We have reached the low stone wall that bounds the edge of the cliff, and we both stand leaning against it, our faces turned to the sea, where the pure and holy smile of moonlight lies.

"I fancied you would know," I say, with an odd calmness which surprises even myself, "because you have known him so long."

"But you know him best now."

Her tiny fingers are locked together on the wall, with a pained clasp.

"Yes, I know him best now," I answer, "because I know—and you do not—how his heart has been some time torn by a girl's heedless words; and I know—and you do not—how impossible it is that anyone, except that girl herself, can ever quite, quite heal it."

A pair of frightened incredulous eyes, that have filled with a sudden awakening light, meet mine, and I smile, as naturally as I can, into their questioning depths.

Just walking into sight now up to the Downs, comes Captain Arthur, looking to the right and left. Eunice does not see him, and we stand quite still there at the wall. As he comes on quickly, looking very tall on the moonlit grass, he sees us both together, and starts and hesitates. I see him take out his watch, and hold it high to read the figures; then he comes slowly on to my side.

"Are you ready?"

His gentle, cold tone strikes me oddly—strikes Eunice oddly too, for the little clenched hands on the stones open and close again rapidly.

"Not quite ready, Captain Arthur," I say, softly laying my hand on hers; "I want to say good-bye to Miss Ivin, and I cannot bear to do it."

He turns half away from us, and waits.

Ah! if they turn from each other now, what glory may not this brilliant moonlight shed on my own life! That one quick bad thought lives only for a moment; a sudden quiet courage comes to me. I stand between them, feeling a great, great deal older than either of them.

"Eunice," I say, "I feel as if, amongst us three, there was something that might and ought to be explained—something that might and ought to be forgiven. Is it for you to do? or for me? or for Arthur?"

For a moment she looks at me half bewildered; then she raises her white quivering face to his, with piteous earnestness.

"For me," she whispers, "for me; and I will say it here—if

Arthur will listen—before you go away together and leave me.”

“Yes, before we go away together. Oh, what is it, Eunice, dear? See how he listens!”

“Once, a long time ago—it seems a long time ago to me—they told me of a silly speech that had been made by Captain Arthur Cortley. I never really believed that it was you who said it, Arthur, even then, when I pretended to. That you could love me for anything except my own poor self, I never, never believed for one single moment. But, having heard it as of you—having heard that you had said my fortune was my charm—I told you, and pretended that I thought it true, just to tease you, like the silly girl I am. I never fancied that, in your heart, you would believe; because, in my own heart, I *never* could have believed it; and the more stern and angry you grew, the more I teased you, until I was really afraid of your wrath, and sent you away. I never fancied, when you went away, that you had gone for ever. When I found it was so—when I really felt it was so,—it made me proud and angry too, as well as sad—very sad. Now, before you go away together, I would like to ask you to forgive me, Arthur.”

One swift, searching look he flashes into her face, then the crimson rushes to cheek and brow. When he speaks, his voice sounds as I have never heard it sound before.

“Eunice, I believe now that those were careless, thoughtless words; not cruelly planned, as I fancied, to shatter my pride and faith in you and in myself. I understood them as they were never meant to be understood; I see it now, and very penitently I ask you to forgive me.”

He holds out his firm right hand, and she meets it with her little nervous fingers all trembling. Then, with a swift pained gesture which I understand quite well, he turns to me.

“Now, Jeanie, can you bid good-bye to Eunice? I am waiting to take you, dear.”

“I can bid good-bye to Eunice now,” I say, standing close beside her, and softly touching her upon the shoulder, “because she has her dear old friend again; and, having her dear old friend again, things are just as they used to be, for him and for herself. One word, dear Eunice, now that you two are so much to each other—so near, so true. Will you open your heart a little wider yet, and let me creep in too, and taste the sweetness of a sister’s love?”

The little arms are thrown around me, and the fair bright head is sobbing on my breast. Over the clinging form, I look up at Arthur, crushing back the tears from my eyes.

“Even this is not all I long for, Captain Arthur. If I ask you to let me call you brother, because I have no brother in the

world ; and if you mean that I may, without caring to say it to me in words,—if you would like me to understand this, then show me so, by taking my little sister from me now, before my heart is broken by her tears ! ”

One moment more, and it is on *his* breast that she is sobbing ; and he knows that the question which I had to answer is answered now.

We walk home together very slowly in the moonlight, Captain Arthur and I, for he is talking of Eunice. And while I listen to the tender passion of gladness in his voice, I know that it is better he should be talking so *of her*, than talking, as it used to be so good to hear him talk, *to me*. Their home is to be my home, he says, as he lingers with me ; but I know that cannot be. I tell him, smiling into his happy face, that I have a home with his grandmother immeasurably superior to that ; and while I say it, my rebellious thoughts are hushed by the one sweet consciousness that there is another home to come—a home in which there are no unsatisfied desires, but where every hope will have a full assurance. I say good night to Captain Arthur at the door, and go in alone.

Dick is sitting up in bed, singing to keep himself awake, because he has the pincushion in bed with him.

“ I finished it in bed, Jean, all by myself here,” he tells me, in a calm, expectant voice. “ Get a light and look.”

I get a light and look. Its glories are disclosed to me very gradually, lest I should lose all mastery over myself. I am considerably impressed, not to say dazzled ; but when at last I feel able to raise my eyes from it, I start back, staring oddly at Dick’s small white face.

“ Oliver, what have you done to yourself ? ”

“ Nothing.”

“ Where is your hair ? ”

“ My hair ? Oh ! in the pincushion.”

I gasp feebly as I gaze. The front half of the child’s head is as closely cropped as scissors can crop it.

“ Oh ! Dick, Dick, what did you do it for ? ”

“ You just put a pin in the pincushion, Jean, and see how easy it goes,” he says, a great anxiety in his serious little shorn face, “ and then you’ll know.”

Leaving Dick to fall asleep again, I go and sit alone for a time in the empty drawing-room. Presently I open the window very softly, and lean out. No one is about. It is too late for loiterers, even here ; but surely I may lengthen to the full, this last bright day of mine. The happy Summer, I say to myself, with a grim little smile, is gone like a pleasant dream at getting-up time ; and the horizon is black and heavy with coming work.

After to-morrow I shall fall back again into the old routine. Ah ! I think even mothers must sometimes grow a little weary of children's society, if they have it always and only. Not often, of course ; but I think that sometimes even *they* must grow a little weary. The calm moon-brightened waves flow softly in upon the rocks, as if never, since the Great Beginning, had they been "vext with waste dreams." But are any of our dreams really waste ? That question neither the sea nor my own heart can answer me, and resting my chin upon my hand, I gaze up into the far, far sky, where the pure moon rides slowly on her way. And there, at last, I find an answer.

I start back, my breath quickening ; for, slowly walking from the place where he found us to-night, comes Captain Arthur. Suddenly my mind changes. Though it makes my cheeks burn, I lean forward again, and wait for him to come up. Then, coolly and easily, I call down :

"Good night, Captain Arthur !"

He looks up with a start.

"Good night, Jean ! What are you doing there ?"

"Shutting the windows. Isn't it a splendid night ?"

"Yes."

"Almost too beautiful to shut out, or to shut oneself in from, isn't it ?"

"Yes."

"But one must do it, I suppose. There must come an end to every pleasant day. Haven't we had a pleasant one to-day ?"

"Have you, Jean ? Have you really had a pleasant day, dear ?"

There is a real anxiety in both voice and face, but it vanishes as my light, laughing answer comes.

"I always guessed my last would be a happy day, and my guesses are always right. But I must shut it out now. I believe actually that the hotel is locked up, and you will not be able to get to your room. If that is how it is to end for you, you will not think it such a pleasant day as I do. Good night again."

I think I may always keep the memory of the glad smile with which he answers me :

"God bless you, Jeanie dear ! Good night."

I close the window now, and rise from my kneeling attitude with a great relief. Two dear friends have been given in one Summer ; and though their lives may be spent far from me, I feel sure that in their hearts will rest a little constant, passionless love for their new sister.

"Perhaps to some, a romance, such as this of mine has been, is given for a lifetime," I say to myself, wandering down the silent stairs ; "but some have never known it even for a day. I am very thankful for my happy Summer month."

A MIDNIGHT MEETING.

I ALWAYS *did* think my brother Solomon a little hard upon me though I confess that there was reason for it. Mine were not exactly his ways, you see ; mine being the ways of pleasantness, and his the paths of peace.

But could I help it that I was not born a parson, like Solomon? *Everybody* isn't born a parson. Indeed, I don't find, that, as a rule, it runs much in families ; and, even if it did, you couldn't expect that two such parsons as Solomon could be born and reared in the bosom of one family.

A long while ago, when we were boys together—in tight blue jackets with gilt buttons, and deep frilled collars—I used to try with all my might and main to imitate Solomon ; and when we were exhibited in society, I always echoed verbatim every remark I heard him make, so that I might share his fame. But that was, as I said, long ago, and gradually such close following in Solomon's steps grew tedious, so I chose a wider way. I was warned a great deal against this wider way, but somehow I lounged easily into it when I found how difficult it was to be always as good as Solomon.

As I said to begin with, I always did think Solomon a little hard upon me. If I used language any stronger than a Quaker's, he would maintain a marked and impressive silence himself ; if I took anything stronger than lemonade, he would ask meaningly for water. to my discomfiture ; and if—after we had grown up, and were living each of us alone in his own house—I took part in the harmless recreations of the age, I would for the next few days live in mortal terror of Solomon's appearance at the gate, with his book of sermons under his arm, and the odour of outraged sanctity pervading him. His figure, coming through the gate, even *without* that brown book under his arm, would have been impressive enough, but it never did appear so. He was curious in appearance, was Solomon, being emphatically *long* in every way. His legs and feet were long ; his arms and hands were long ; his hair was long ; his nose was long ; and his sermons were long. His coat-tails were uncommonly long too ;

and indeed I think the only things about him which were *not* long were his sleeves.

After any particularly jovial evening at the Squire's, or at Joe Fleming's at Blagly (the Squire bred the best fighting-cocks in the county, except Joe's; and Joe's whisky was the primeest that ever escaped duty), you may guess that my heart didn't bound with joy at the sight of Solomon's long figure and long face; still, on ordinary occasions, Sol and I were good friends, and I looked forward to the day when he should convert me to his own ways, and we should read the book of sermons aloud by turns through our old age. But then I knew there was plenty of time for that.

Well, we had marked the fight of the season, and I had backed Joe's bird heavily. The little affair was to come off on the Sunday afternoon, and for all the week before, we were so excited (Joe and I and our chums, and the Squire and his chums), that we spent every evening together, discussing our birds and our bets, not to mention the despatching of a good deal of the Squire's home-brewed, and of my old port, and of Joe's Scotch. You see, we didn't read so much in those days as you do now, and so spent more time over these lighter duties. We didn't talk very much either; one of Solomon's sermons, divided among us, would have lasted us all for a week; but we smoked—well, pretty steadily.

The Sunday came at last, and in the morning I sat in my corner of Solomon's pew, paying the greatest attention to him; for I wouldn't for the world he should suspect where I was going in the afternoon, or that I had the slightest interest in either Joe's bird or the Squire's. What was my horror, then, when Solomon, in the very middle of his discourse (I always knew it was the middle when he began to say "lastly"), alluded darkly to a "besetting sin of the age," as a sport at which only Satan could laugh. "And he," concluded Solomon, and I felt his eye upon me, "chuckles with glee to see men so degrade themselves." I broke out into a damp heat. Could any one have turned traitor and told Solomon? I kept my eyes down upon the carpet, and tried to make a resolution that this should be my last cock-fight; but somehow the resolution jumbled itself up with speculations as to how the Squire would feel to-night when he was beaten, and how I should feel when I pocketed my £100 winnings.

"I shall certainly buy that colt of Joe's; and now I think of it, I may as well get Solomon a new umbrella. I daresay he didn't mean anything about cock-fighting, after all. He always had whims for attacking our sports, and, of course, that innocent diversion must take its turn, like bowls and billiards."

I had forgiven Solomon by the time he had doffed his long

gown and joined me in the churchyard, and I only said, amiably, "You were rather hard upon us all to-day, as usual, Sol."

"Was I?" he questioned in his slow way. "Hard or soft, it does but little good, Jacob."

I turned the conversation gingerly. I could not easily prove his words to be untrue, and it wouldn't be polite if I did—so I didn't.

"Good-bye, Sol," I said, with great relief, when we reached the parsonage gate.

"Shall I see you at service this evening?" was Solomon's most unfortunate inquiry, as he slowly removed his umbrella to his left hand, preparatory to giving me his right.

"I hope so, but I cannot say I am *quite* sure."

I answered in that way for the purpose of breaking it to him as gently as I could. I knew Solomon felt this sort of thing as sharply as I felt a razor scratch in shaving, so I put it that way, that I *hoped* so, but could not say that I was quite sure.

"I'm sorry you are not sure, Jacob," said he; "I should have liked to see you at church to-night. I don't feel very well to-day, so will you come in now, and stay the afternoon with me?"

"I wish I could, Sol," said I, as jauntily as possible, "but the fact is I've promised an old friend at Luckheaton" (Luckheaton lay in the direction exactly opposite to Blagly) "to go over and have a quiet chat with him. He is not able to go about much himself."

I suppose Solomon was shaking hands in his ordinary manner, but his long fingers seemed to me to have tied themselves about mine, to hold me back.

"You want a new umbrella, Sol," remarked I, neatly preparing the way for the gift I had in store for him; and as I thought, turning the conversation with consummate tact.

"Do I?" asked Solomon, looking down upon the machine as if he had never seen it before in his life. "We both of us want a good many new things, Jacob; new habits, new aims, new——"

"Ah! yes, indeed we do," sighed I, as I felt the grip of his fingers relaxing. "You're looking all right, I'm glad to see. Don't go and fancy yourself ailing, Sol; it's a womanish trick, and not at all like you."

"No, I am not fanciful," he said, tucking his book tenderly under his long arm. "Good-bye, then, Jacob; I shall see you again some time to-night, shall I?"

Awkward, that query at the end, but I nodded *yes* to him just as if I had known——Let me see, where was I? Well, Solomon and I parted very good friends. He looked back at me with a smile as I waited, and afterwards I looked back at him—with a smile too, for at the moment I turned, a branch of his old pear-tree caught his hat (which he always wore at the very back of

his head) and kept it, and he walked on to the parsonage door, without an idea that his head was bare. I hurried on cheerfully then, feeling pretty sure I was safe. Solomon would be in his study all the afternoon, and in his pulpit most of the evening. Then he would drink his cup of strong tea, and sleep the sleep of a parson till morning, with his lattice window wide open, and a square of the night sky exactly before his eyes.

"My sleep is calm," he used to say, "if my last look has been on heaven."

And calm, I believe, it always was, though his bed was narrow and short, and he—though narrow too—was long. Sol never could be induced to spend on himself any money which he could spare to give away, and so he persisted in using still the bed he had had as a boy.

Well, we had rare sport on that Sunday afternoon, and our bird came off the winner, though the Squire's was as plucky a little cock as ever got beaten. There he lay, when the tussle was over, with his comb up and his mouth a little open, as if he were only taking in breath for a fresh attack, yet as dead as if he were roasted with stuffing.

Joe gave us a supper after the fight; then we despatched a bottle of port apiece, over settling our bets; then we gave our minds to pleasure, and enjoyed a good brew of Joe's punch; and the Squire, though he had been beaten, was one of the cheerfullest of us all.

As it was Sunday, we determined to separate in good time, so when it got towards eleven we set out; while Joe stood in his lighted doorway, shouting hearty good-nights after us. I had waited to make an appointment with him for the next day, that we might conclude the bargain for the colt, so I was a little behind the others in starting.

"Take care of yourself," called Joe; "you have the most money, and the furthest to go. Mind the notes. Five twenties; and I've copied the numbers, that we may be safe. Tell the Squire so, if he waylays you in the dark."

This was Joe's parting joke, and when I answered it I gave a kindly touch to the pocket-book in my breast-pocket; and the Squire, who heard us, called out that he daren't try to-night, as there was a moon behind the clouds.

I was riding a favourite little mare, who knew every step of the way between my own stables and Joe's, so I just rode peaceably on in the dark, recalling the flavour of Joe's whisky, and singing over one of the verses of a song the Squire had given us:

"With five pounds your standing wages,
You shall daintily be fed;
Bacon, beans, salt beef, cabb-ages,
Buttermilk, and barley-bread."

Suddenly the mare made a deliberate stop, and roused me from my melodious dreaminess. Certainly at the end of this lane, a gate opened on the heath, but then she understood quite well that she had only to lift and push this gate, and she had never before roused me here, when I had been riding sleepily home from Blagly.

"Steady, my girl! Why, what is it?" cried I, for she was shying back in the lane, and behaving in every way like a lunatic. I gave her such a cut as she had not felt since she was broken in; and then, without a word of warning, she reared entirely upright, took me at a disadvantage, and sent me sprawling into the ditch, turning then, and galloping back towards Blagly without me.

I was none the worse for my fall, only shaken a little, and astonished a great deal; so I picked up first myself, and then my hat, and stumbled on to find the heath gate. I had my hand upon it, when the moon came sailing along from under a cloud, and the whole level waste of heath was made visible in a moment. But the sight of the heath, in all its barren ugliness, was not what struck me with such a chill, and made my eyes prick, and my throat grow apoplectic. I never gave a second glance in *that* direction, for there—close to me, only on the opposite side of the closed gate—stood my brother Solomon. I could not have mistaken *him*, if there had been only the very faintest flicker of light. There he was, in his long coat and his high hat, with his arms folded on the top bar of the gate, the brown book under one of them as usual, and his eyes fixed steadily on me.

"Solomon," I said, growing very cold and uncomfortable under his gaze, "it's getting chilly for you to be out."

He did not answer that, and so presently I went cheerfully on:

"I've been—you remember where I said I was going—" I stopped again here. I did not want to confess where I had been, if he did not know; and I did not want to tell another falsehood if he *did* know. So I put it to him that way, intending to be guided by his answer. It was so long in coming, that I took heart of grace to try another tack. "Where have *you* been, Sol?"

Another pause, and then he answered, just in his old slow way:

"I've been at home expecting *you*, Jacob—waiting for you until I could wait no longer."

"I'm sorry for that," I said, feeling a little cheerier to hear him speak. "I would not have been so late, only I had to go round by Blagly on business—I daresay you notice that I am coming from there now. I only went on business, Sol."

He made another pause before he answered, and though it was a trick of Solomon's, and always had been, I felt myself growing uncomfortably cold. Why could he not have stayed at home, as parsons should on Sunday nights? But the icy chill turned all at once to a clammy heat, when Solomon asked me quietly, and without turning his steady gaze from my face,

"How much of that filthy lucre have you won, Jacob?"

"Wh—what?" I stammered—and then you might have knocked me down with the very smallest of the feathers in Joe's winning bird—"Wh—what, Solomon?"

He repeated the question, slowly and steadily,

"How much of that filthy lucre have you won, Jacob?"

"You—you have been dreaming, Solomon."

Unlinking his long fingers, which had been clasped together on the gate, he stretched one hand towards me.

"Five notes," he said, still with the unmoved gaze. "Five worthless, ill-won notes."

I clasped my breast-pocket anxiously.

"I have a little money here, Sol," I said, as airily as I could; "a few pounds more or less; and I want to buy you a new umbrella, yours is getting shabby. I'll go into town to-morrow and choose one."

I tried to get up a little cheerfulness over it, but Solomon's gaze damped it all out of me; and besides, he had not taken back his long, hungry, outstretched hand.

"Five notes," he said, again; "five worthless, ill-won notes, Jacob!"

"Even if I had the notes, Sol," I began, trembling like a leaf in a storm, "even if I had them—ha, ha! what an absurd idea!—what should *you* want with them? And—and," I added, clutching desperately at a straw of courage, "what right have you to them?"

"There is no right in the question," said Solomon, and his face grew longer and longer. "It is all wrong."

"You don't often joke, Sol," said I, pretty bravely, though I was trembling like any number of aspens, "but, of course, you're joking now, and it's rather late for a joke, isn't it? Come along home with me."

"I am not going your way, now, Jacob. Give me the notes."

And would you believe it? I feebly put out my arm, and laid my precious notes on his long open fingers.

"Shall you be home to-night?" I asked, trying to finish up the scene in my natural tones.

"To-night? It is midnight now."

"God bless my soul, is it really?" I exclaimed, not so much surprised, as ridiculously flurried and nervous under my brother's intent gaze.

Solomon had shivered as those words passed my lips, and for the first time he looked away.

"Good night," he said, in his slow, absent way; and then I think he added three other words, which he often did add to his good-byes; but he spoke so low that I scarcely heard, and I felt so angry with him, too, that I didn't even try to hear.

I walked on moodily across the heath. All the benign effects of Joe's punch had evaporated; all the pleasure of the sport had been swept away in one chill blast; the only definite idea that possessed me was the determination *not* to buy my brother Solomon a new umbrella.

I always carried my own key, and forbade the servants to sit up for me, so you may guess I was surprised to find my groom watching for me at the gate.

"Walking, sir?" he exclaimed, meeting me with a hurried step and worried face. "I hoped you'd ride home, that you might be the quicker at the Parsonage. They've sent for you twenty times at least, sir. Mr. Solomon——"

"I know," I interrupted; "Mr. Solomon is missing. I've just met him. I'll go on and tell them so, for I'll be bound the parish is all up in arms."

All the parish *was* up in arms, and had all gathered at the Parsonage, as it seemed to me; but—Solomon was there too: lying on his narrow bed opposite the open window, with the square of moonlit sky before his closed eyes.

They tell me something about a swoon, or some such womanish trick; and it may be true and it may not. At any rate, I remember nothing, after the first few sentences they uttered. Solomon had been ailing for some time—so the words went,—and had felt worse than usual that day, and lonely and restless. Still he had insisted on preaching in the evening, and afterwards had toiled up to my house to see if I was at home, and then toiled back again. All evening he had been expecting me, and kept listening for my step, while he sent again and again to see if I had returned. Just once he had risen excitedly in bed; then his strength had failed, and those who were listening heard him bid his brother good night, with the whispered prayer, "God bless you!" Then he had lain quietly back—with his fading eyes upon that glimpse of heaven beyond the lattice window—and had died quietly at midnight.

What? The money? Don't ask *me* what became of the money. Over those five notes I worried myself at last into the most serious brain-fever that ever man came back from, into life again. They were gone. No trace could I ever find of my old pocket-book, though I made it well known that the numbers of the notes had been taken. When I had offered £50 reward, and

that didn't bring them, I doubled it, and offered one hundred. Who would care to keep them then? Who would keep five notes which were stopped, when they could receive five available ones of equal value, by only bringing the worthless old pocket-book to me? But no one brought it, and then I advertised anew, offering £150 reward for those five £20 notes. Of course I tried to make out that it was the old pocket-book I set the value on; but, after all, I didn't much care who had the laugh against me, if I could only set this matter straight, and give it an air of daylight reality. But no—*that* never brought them.

Another cock-fight? No, I never saw another cock-fight. Don't ask me any more. It's five-and-thirty years ago—let it
~~be.~~

TWO HALLOW EVES.

"Just the same old story every night, Will; I wish you would not hurry away, and leave the Squire and me to this inevitable subject."

"Constant changes rung upon the heiress theme, eh?" asked Will, as he lounged against the greenhouse door, slowly puffing his cigar in the October moonlight.

"There seem to me no changes at all; only a constant repetition of the theme," answered Bruce, wearily pushing back his hair: "a change of any sort would be a relief."

"Suppose we try the relief of luck, now," said Will, laughing at his own bad pun.

"It would be your relief then," his brother answered, laughing too; "you are the one supposed to be born lucky, you know."

"Yes, I would not sell my anticipation of some vague future luck for all your inheritance, Bruce, my boy, I can tell you."

"Of course not, if the inheritance is to be saddled with a wife you did not choose yourself. Why should a man—because he has a nice little property of his own—angle for another?"

Will was laughing heartily now, at something Bruce either did not heed, or did not understand.

"Suppose Miss Aileen Verney saddled with another nice little property: in what light should you regard the angling then, brave Bruce?"

A flush rose to Bruce Bonner's face, and for a few minutes the brothers smoked in silence.

There was a great similarity between them, even in personal appearance, though Bruce, the heir of Bonnerglen and eight thousand pounds a year, was tall and remarkably fine-looking, while Will, the younger son, who did not seem to be going to work his way into the Church, though he was brought up with that intention, was small and slight—as men should not be, according to all approved ideas,—with a face only remarkable for its merriment.

The brothers had puffed for some minutes in silence, when Will, taking his cigar from his mouth and shaking off the ash

proposed that he should be informed exactly how matters stood, before he brought his "luck" to bear upon the occasion.

"It seems," said Bruce, "that Miss Gainsford—I can remember her being here, a mite of a child, about fifteen years ago, just after her mother died—is come home from abroad at last, and Aunt Prue has offered to bring her here at once, to renew the intimacy which has had a serious rupture of fifteen years. Why I don't even remember what the child was like. Do you?"

"Go on. I never had any memory," observed Will, drily.

"That is all; she is to be brought here for my delectation, and I am expected to fall down and worship her at once—the golden calf in all conscience. But the worst of it, Will, is that they must needs bring Aileen here, to look on at this dire game."

"It strikes me you are hot this chilly night," drawled Will; come round to the point, please."

"What point?" asked Bruce, angrily.

"It is a pointless affair from beginning to end. What do I want with thirty thousand pounds? I have no earthly use for all I have."

"Your wife's fortune might be settled on your younger brother," suggested Will, slowly.

"I wish you would not laugh about it."

"I could not; there is something far too rotten in the state of Denmark. The programme is all marked out, I see. The heiress comes; the heir woos; the forsaken pines; the parent approves; parent's sister purrs; marriage in high life; poverty-stricken younger brother observed in the background supporting the forsaken. I say, what's the matter now?"

"Don't speak so of Aileen. I would rather disobey a hundred fathers!" objected Bruce, hotly.

"It strikes me that that would be a good deal easier than disobeying one—especially such a father as yours and mine, Bruce," answered his brother, quietly. "His whole heart is set on your welfare, and it is not his fault that he cannot help thinking property needful with a wife. Leave it all to me and my luck. Sleep with sweet confidence in me, and let your spirits rise with you in the morning, my boy."

"By the way, Will," said Bruce, half laughing, "do you remember that Miss Gainsford's name is Diana?"

"Of the Ephesians?"

"I which you had chanced to meet her in Oxford last week."

"I fancy I did," said Will, coldly; "if so, she is very tall—within an inch of my own height, I should say."

"I hate tall women!"

"Of course you do. Well, Bruce, you have to do only two things yourself. Obey your father unquestioningly—you will never have another father to adore you as this one does—by pay-

ing all sorts of attentions to Miss Gainsford and leave Aileen to me."

"No—confound it."

"I won't be out in the dark with you while you say wicked words."

"But what do you really mean me to do?" inquired Bruce.

"Just what I say, my dear fellow."

"Then I cannot do it."

"Very well. Good night, and may sweet sleep thine eyelids close!"

"Don't go just yet," said Bruce, trying to speak carelessly, "it is so early."

"I want my beauty sleep. And I have promised you success," Will went on, earnestly, "if you promise me obedience."

"But how can you?" asked his brother, doubtfully.

Will laughed.

"I am not like the schoolmaster who supplied intellect, as well as instruction, to his pupils; and I add that your obedience must be blind and unconditional."

"I always did lean on you, you know, Will," began Bruce, still hesitating.

"You can lean as heavily as you like at this particular crisis, old fellow. I'll bear your chin up bravely by the brave heart within."

"I say, Will," said Bruce, looking at him quizzically, "you never would have been plucked if——"

"Ye powers around me! what does he mean?" ejaculated Will, raising his eyes tragically in the moonlight. "I plucked—I! True there was a time when rigid professors found it necessary to dispense with a little of my superfluous plumage, my flights having been too high—but plucked!"

"Well, then, Will," is it all arranged?" said Bruce.

"You should have transposed your sentence, and so answered yourself—'Then it is all well arranged, Will.' Yes, and you have simply these two things to do. Be as attentive and agreeable to Miss Gainsford as possible, without love-making—you need not mind that; and look on placidly while I do my best to win—I mean to amuse—Miss Verney. That will be harder you think? I daresay it will, poor fellow, but try to bear it, for you need not be jealous, Bruce; I have not the remotest intention of falling in love. Now everything is straightforward in the little game before us. 'I will lay on for Tusculum, and lay thou on for Rome,' Tusculum being represented by Miss Aileen Verney, and Rome by her rival."

"But, Will, one more question. Would it not, after all, be more honourable to disobey my father at once?"

"And break down," said Will, quietly, "the fabric which he

has reared to the honour of his favourite son? No, I don't quite see that, Bruce. This heiress mania has hold of him, and, unless it is eradicated, you will only win from him an unwilling and disappointed consent to your marriage with Aileen, who, in that case, would take our mother's place here almost on sufferance. This crotchet, that your wife would not be worthy of you unless she had property, is only a crotchet, of course; but it is planned for your sake, old fellow, and so you should respect it."

"I do, Will," he answered, readily, "and that is why——"

"Yes," Will interrupted, coolly, "that is why, as you say, we should think of his happiness, too, in the choice of your wife. To make his choice and yours agree, is the turn *my* luck is to effect. Once more, good night; I have said as many as the little Capulet did, I do believe."

The brothers separated with a hearty hand-shake which had something more than usual in it—of confidence and encouragement on one side, of trust and relief upon the other,—and the moonlight rested peacefully on the broad acres of Bonnerglen, while Will Bonner sat up in his room and wrote a long letter, which did not seem to require any premeditation, and which he did not consign to the post-bag next day.



A quiet little brougham, its boxes strapped upon the roof, came swiftly up the avenue at Bonnerglen, and as swiftly rushed the colour to Bruce Bonner's face as he stood, bare-headed, on the wide stone steps, to greet his guests in true old-fashioned courtesy. Will, on a couch in the hall, laughed behind his paper, until a gentle little elderly lady was landed close beside him; then he dropped it, to greet her, passing on very slowly to the girl by whose side Bruce stood, with a great gladness in his eyes.

Aileen Verney was essentially a loveable girl; the pliant nature which shone in the wistful, dove-like eyes, appealed straight to the heart, and won it, and the sweet unselfishness of every word and act, kept firm her hold upon it.

The ladies were still loitering in the drawing-room, in travelling dress, when the Bonnerglen carriage dashed back from the station, and again two ladies descended; but the Squire was the only one who hurried out to meet them.

This would not do for a beginning of the brothers' programme. Will made an unobserved sign to Bruce, and he, too, left the room, though with a lagging step. Will's face wore an odd look as he talked to Mrs. Verney, watching the door curiously.

First the Squire brought in his sister, then Bruce followed with the expected heiress. A half-smile played round the corners of Will's mouth when he saw a tall girl, clumsily and heavily clad in an ugly brown dress and a broad-brimmed black hat—the

tasteless contrast sending an unpleasant sensation all through Will,—her head thrown back in an attitude of intense conceit, and in her hand an eyeglass, which she used with distressing parade. A good face it might be, but who could tell, with those odious-shaped glasses across her nose, and that very disagreeable expression in every feature?

Will noticed Aileen shrinking timidly as Miss Gainsford treated her to a supercilious stare and a condescending touch of the fingers; he noticed Mrs. Verney's unconcealed look of surprise; he noticed the one quick glance which Bruce threw across at him; he noticed how well his father tried to hide his surprise; he noticed his aunt's efforts to catch Miss Gainsford's eye; and then he found out that he must hide his own astonishment, for she was coming towards him.

"This Mr. Bonner I have met before," she said, in a loud, affected voice. "At least—yes—no—*was* it you I met at Dr. Tessien's?"

"I believe it was my happiness to meet you there," said Will, his quiet, high-bred manner contrasting forcibly with hers.

"Ah! yes, I thought so," she said, giving another look round, with the abominable eye-glasses; "but really I meet so many new faces—oh, so many!—of course I cannot remember them all, can I? Beautiful place here, Mr. Bonner." It was like a blow to the poor Squire when she suddenly addressed him, walking rapidly over to each of the four windows in succession, "criticising his favourite view through a trumpery glass," as he phrased it afterwards. "Beautiful place! I should like to live in a place like this very well. Elms down by the river; or beeches, are they? I am so forgetful about the names of trees—pretty, though. Yes, indeed, delightful. Ah! this window is prettier still. How gay the flower-beds are! Yes, I like that, really; that border of *Eranthis hyemalis*—don't you? But of course you do, else it would not be there."

"The aconite, you mean?" asked the Squire, coldly.

"Oh! I hope you don't call flowers by their English names, Mr. Bonner! Now, just suppose," she added, lispingly, with a long laugh in which no one joined her, "that we called *mignonne* 'little darling,' which is what it means, you know. Oh, how funny! Gather me some 'little darling.' How our gardeners would laugh! Oh, no; I think it sacrilege to call flowers by English names!"

"Is '*aconite*' English?" asked Will; but, without noticing him, she turned to Aileen.

"Miss Verney, I am sure, agrees with me. I can see it in her face, really I can."

"I should never be able to talk about the flowers at all then," she answered, softly. "I know only their common names."

But *you* know the difference between an elm and a beech?" observed Will, thinking it high time to assume his rôle.

"Oh, yes; of course I have known that since I knew the names at all," she answered, laughing.

"Then you know enough," he said, decisively. "Leave Bruce to the foreign languages."

Miss Gainsford gave one haughty glance, that swept over both of them, and then turned, with a weak, broad smile, to Bruce.

"Do you really like foreign languages?" she lisped. "Oh! I am so glad—so do I; we will talk German always, and French. It will be delightful. I hate talking English."

"I should not have guessed it," began Bruce, unthinkingly, but Will pulled him up by a sign. "I shall be afraid," he said, changing his tone suddenly, "of showing my deficiencies before an adept."

"But I'm not an adept in everything—no, indeed," she replied, with another unprovoked laugh. "Ask Miss Bonner if I did not make a blunder this morning; I gave her the wrong medicine! Oh, I cannot help forgetting! Wasn't that absurd?"

Poor Bruce's lip curled visibly as he stood, the quiet recipient of this heartless nonsense, and he felt intensely thankful when Mrs. Verney proposed an adjournment.

The Squire glanced at Bruce, as Will closed the door behind the ladies, but he stopped short in what he was on the verge of saying, and added,

"Time to dress, boys. What a ridiculous thing it is to judge any one just at first!"

Of course it fell to Bruce to take Miss Gainsford in to dinner, but her cavalier did not satisfy her; she insisted on talking loudly to the Squire, raising her voice unnecessarily for the purpose, choosing her subjects without the slightest taste or discrimination, and using her eyeglasses with less. Aileen she treated with a patronising superciliousness which was maddening to Bruce. The elder ladies did not seem to be worth a moment's consideration in her eyes. Will, she almost ignored. The Squire and Bruce she inundated with her gushing sentences—the kind of rapid discourse for which, perhaps, most of anything in the world, the Squire had a supreme contempt. He could not forbear a sigh of intense relief when the ladies left the room.

"You appear to have taken to each other already, Bruce," observed Will, drily. "Some natural—what do you call it? But she behaves oddly, sir, don't you think?" Will continued, addressing the Squire, as he lazily sipped his wine.

"I think it is hardly fair to judge her to-night, Will," prevaricated the Squire.

"It is a fair judgment, if it is unfair to judge," observed Will, carelessly. "She behaves like an arrogant young minx—though

I don't know at all what a minx is. Did you remark, Bruce," he added, after a pause, "how she tried to stare down poor little Miss Verney? Never mind contradicting," put in Will distinctly, as a hasty exclamation of disgust rose to Bruce's lips. "If you did not remark it, *we* did—did we not, sir?—and we remarked the very gentle manner in which Miss Verney took it. That is the nicest and the prettiest girl I have seen for a long time."

"Yes," said the Squire, who was led by Will's opinions a great deal oftener than he would have liked to confess, "she seems a sweet little thing; but Miss Gainsford is handsome too, and so very rich!"

"Very rich, as you say," echoed Will; "and her little antics are very rich too—to me, as a looker-on. Shall we join her now, Bruce? You promised to take her to see the fountain by moonlight. Romantic walk it will be—eyeglasses unnecessary."

The two girls were standing at the fire, when the gentlemen entered the drawing-room, but Miss Gainsford turned her back unceremoniously on her companion when she saw them.

"I am waiting to show you the fountain, Miss Gainsford," said Bruce, biting his lip.

"Oh, yes, thanks—it will be delightful! Oh, Mr. Bonner, you must come too. I will not take a 'No.' No one ever says 'No' to me. Yes, I long to see the fountain. I remember one at the Crystal Palace, where I lost my party. It was so very awkward, but they found me afterwards, and it felt so delightful to be found again."

The poor Squire went out with them, very like a voluntary martyr; and among the sleeping flowers, in the calm moonlight, the light frivolous tongue went on unceasingly.

"Twaddle!" snapped Miss Bonner from the window. "What induced her father to send her abroad?"

"She has a very odd style about her," echoed little Mrs. Verney.

"Aileen, why should we not see the fountain too. Will you venture?" asked Will.

She ventured only too readily. The poor child seemed stifling, in this pain of seeing Bruce kept so entirely away from her, while she knew she had no right to be surprised or hurt.

"Poor old Bruce!" began Will, meditatively, as they sauntered past the aconite border; "those foreign ideas of Miss Gainsford's floor him completely. I daresay he finds it hard to pay his father's guest the necessary attention. It all falls on him, you see, for I sneak out of it. He must pay some penalty for being the first-born. I expect he would be glad to change places with me, poor lad, at this present moment."

And this was Will's love-making to Aileen! Bruce would not have looked quite so crest-fallen if he could have heard it.

"Two more admirers of nature come on the same expedition," cried Miss Gainsford, in her rapid way, as they came up. "How delightful! But Miss Verney will not appreciate it as I do. Mr. Bruce, are you not proud of being future possessor of this magnificent spot?"

"I would rather be what I am now than possessor, Miss Gainsford," said Bruce, looking affectionately into his father's face.

"Would you really, now? How delightfully romantic!"

The Squire, angry and ill at ease, had to bear the girl's unceasing, senseless prattle on his walk back, and to bear it all, too, for Bruce did not come to the rescue as usual. As for Will, nothing ever worried him! He only smiled an amused smile, that had a little pride in it, as he listened.

No need to tell of each day as it passed. Every amusement and luxury was provided for the guests; every charm of a grand and snug old country house was found at Bonnerglen; yet that October week crawled for every one.

Aileen was damped and discouraged by Miss Gainsford's haughty and supercilious bearing to her; and this cruel disappointment in her visit, after the dreams in which she had been indulging, deepened the wistful sadness in her eyes, and gave the girl solitary, dreamy ways of going about alone, and speaking very little to any one. Will was her one, great relief. Bruce maintained his allegiance to Diana Gainsford through all; and the elder ladies—who avoided Miss Gainsford as much as possible—were chiefly together. So, while Aileen took every opportunity of wandering off alone, the poor Squire, discontented himself, and ill at ease, took to following her example; and sometimes, meeting the gentle little girl who was such a pleasant contrast to the one from whom he fled, he would join her, and talk with her, soothed and cheered by her soft girlish voice and bright girlish ideas. Thus there grew up, gradually and imperceptibly, in these two hearts the simple love of father and daughter.

Thus matters stood when other guests arrived for the Squire's birthday—guests who came annually on or before the last day of October, which was the memorable anniversary.

"Oh! how delightful!" cried Miss Gainsford, when she heard this; "a house full of people to keep *Hallow-Eve*. The very thing we Irish girls love!"

Now the Squire's birthday was the gayest holiday of the year at Bonnerglen. From the master down to the meanest yard-boy—host, guests, tenantry, and servants—all kept high festival on the last day of October. Considering this, it may be imagined how Miss Gainsford's speech was received. *Hallow-Eve*, indeed! Was all the rejoicing to be dedicated to that Irish farce, and the good old English Squire's good old English custom to be ignored

in this contemptuous way, by a girl who was a very stranger to the place? For a time Bruce stuck to his grievance, contradicting Miss Gainsford and all but losing his temper; but he saw that it was of no use; indeed she paraded the Hallow-Eve observance all the more for his interference, so he let it pass.

Will, in his unruffled good humour, let it pass too.

One morning Bruce, on a lounge in one of the drawing-room windows, was making out a list, under Miss Gainsford's orders, of the guests who had accepted invitations for the Squire's birthday party. Will, sitting backwards on his chair, was entertaining a bevy of young ladies, but particularly addressing himself, when he could, to Aileen Verney, whose sweet, low laugh, though generally drowned in other noisier ones, made poor Bruce's heart beat faster at his enforced occupation.

"These are all, Miss Gainsford," he said, with a sigh of relief; "these and the home-party, as you may call us."

"May I?" she cried. "Thanks; that's delightful, to be included in your home-party! That means, you know, that I belong to your home. I thought you would get to think so when I had been here a little time. Now, then, the question is—come, gentlemen and ladies—the question is, What are we to do, to celebrate the glorious anniversary of Hallow-Eve?"

"It has always been a custom here, Miss Gainsford, as I have told you," spoke up Bruce, hotly, in his father's absence, "to keep the Squire's birthday with a dance, for ourselves, and our tenants, and our servants. We have two or three bands down, and we always do the same."

"But we must diversify it this year," she persisted; "oh! really we must, you know. Gentlemen, speak up. Mr. Bruce Bonner is so terribly conservative; who will help me to put a little spirit into him? Oh, Mr. Bonner," she added, glibly, as the Squire entered the room, "we want something new for Hallow-Eve; please to give a vote what it shall be, and choose something delightful—do. I am so anxious to have a regular Irish Hallow-Eve."

Will saw his father's astonishment, and, looking up, he said, in a tone perfectly courteous, but not the usual tone of easy, indolent Will—

"Miss Gainsford is so thoroughly Irish, you see, father, that she cannot bear to dispense with any remembrance of her green fatherland. We can add some new idea to the regular scheme for the enjoyment of your birthday, but not one item of it can be left out. So, Miss Gainsford, instead of altering, please to add. Do you understand?"

With her glasses up to her eyes, and her lips compressed and arched, she looked at Will from "top to toe."

"I always understood that Mr. Bonner was master here," she said, sarcastically, at last.

"Every Mr. Bonner is master here," returned Will, composedly but always your servant to command."

No, there was no provoking Will! He seemed as comfortable under her scornful gaze as any one else would have been under her smile. She turned, graciously now, to a young Oxonian, who was playing carpet-knight with all his might and main.

"Mr. Everby, shall we act a play on Hallow-Eve?"

Such an abrupt proposal! Such a deliberate provocation in the repetition of the Hallow-Eve! Such a person to whom to address the question! The poor Squire began to wonder whether he really could be in his own house, and among the old familiar faces.

"Oh, ah; yes, capital fun, I should think. What do our friends say?"

But "our friends" did not seem eager to appropriate the term by volunteering their thoughts. There was quite an ominous pause.

"Oh, it will soon take when we have decided," she said, hurriedly. "Mr. Bruce, you write the list of actors, and head it with yourself and me; then put Mr. Everby and Miss Verney——"

"But have you asked Miss Verney?" interposed the Squire, turning to his little new friend, as Bruce followed him anxiously with his eyes.

"Oh, we cannot afford to ask everybody!" observed Miss Gainsford, haughtily. "If we find afterwards that they don't do, or won't do, we can supply their places. Have the kindness to put down Miss Verney's name, Mr. Bruce."

"Of course I will act as far as I can," said Aileen, gently.

"Now, Mr. Bruce, go on," said Di, glancing hastily over the room; "put down—let me see—oh, Captain Dale; and"—after a long pause, she had hit upon the one really perfect actor in the house—"and put down your brother. There, that is the list of our *dramatis personæ*. We will arrange the play now. Shall it be Shakespeare, Sheridan, or Goldsmith? Give me a show of hands, please, as I say them. Sheridan, is it? Oh, no, I think we will have Shakespeare; his is such delightful language."

"But the show of hands," began the Squire.

She interrupted him unceremoniously. "There was not much difference," she answered, with the greatest nonchalance.

"Shakespeare's plays are rather too long, I think," observed the Squire.

"Too long! Oh, Mr. Bonner, for shame! But you shall have a wine table among the audience."

"We will not act a whole play," said Will then, in his firm

quiet voice. "A good plan would be to act a charade, Miss Gainsford, and let each syllable be represented by a scene from any play the actors choose;—the actors being told off, and each party choosing its own scene, to suit its own syllable. Thus each party can be prepared to follow the others, and so prevent a tiresome waiting between the scenes. What do you say to that plan?"

All agreed so readily that Di was fain to take it up at last.

"I have no objection, so we may as well decide upon it. Remember that I choose Mr. Bruce for my scene," she said, moving away as the Squire did, and speaking loud enough for every one to hear. Outside the room she pulled Mr. Bonner by the sleeve, and whispered, "Who is that Mr. Everby? Is he rich?"

"I do not know," he answered, the hot blood mounting to his face in anger.

"I must know before I choose my party," she continued, still in a whisper. "I shall choose him if he is rich; I am so fond of wealth, aren't you?"

Ah, she touched a sore point there, whether she knew it or not.

"He will be rich when he gets rid of the incumbrance he has in the form of a father," muttered the Squire, in a voice suppressed in intense scorn; "so will the other lad you chose."

"Your son? Oh yes, of course he will. I like him very much—most agreeable, and intellectual, and polite."

Poor old Squire! He who had always lived like a monarch in his palace—loved and served, but feared too, with just a wholesome, acceptable fear—was to have his sanctity and his sanctuary spoiled by this girl; this acquaintance of a few days (for the old friendship with the Irish child could not extend to this Frenchified young lady), who ventured, of her own will, to overturn the good old customs, and the very orders of the master? And all this she did on the strength of that paltry wealth of hers! Just Heaven! was this to go on under his very eyes, and under the very eyes of his sons, who had never shown disrespect for any of his wishes? Would it not make Will a lazier ne'er-do-weel than ever? and was it not enough to sicken poor Bruce of the very idea of marrying? Good fellow, what patience he showed for her nonsense!

Next morning, which was Saturday (Hallow-Eve fell on a Monday that year), Di Gainsford gathered a set of volumes of Shakespeare round her, and ensconced herself on a snug seat at the fire, totally setting aside the prior claims of any elder lady to this most comfortable seat in the room. The young guests hovered about, sometimes venturing a suggestion, but she took little heed of them, and kept up a constant flow of talk, more in

the form of a soliloquy than anything else. At last she burst out suddenly, addressing every one, while her fingers turned rapidly the pages of the illustrated volume on her knee.

"I have a word in my head."

"Only one?" asked Will. "What an apparent anomaly!"

"Really, Mr. Will, you use such odd words! Anomaly! What a word! I don't believe any one here knows what it means."

"I have been plucked at Oxford," said Will, coolly; "that's the way to learn the meaning of odd words."

"Is your word a long one, Miss Gainsford?" asked Bruce.

"I am not going to say it aloud," she cried. "Just imagine saying it to the very people who are to guess!—and before Mr. Bonner too," she added, turning to the Squire, "when I particularly want him to guess it."

"I never guessed anything in my life."

"No, I don't think you *are* good at guessing."

A minute afterwards, Mr. Everby had to recall Miss Gainsford's attention to the subject in hand.

"Oh yes, thanks, I forgot," she said, jumping up; "we have no time to spare. Mr. Bonner, you must let us have a lot of servants, please. We have so little time, because of the Sunday between—only two days, you see, for all our preparations; and we cannot put them off, because we cannot call Tuesday Halloween. Besides, I am going away on Tuesday—so near, is it not?"

"Could you not stay?" asked Bruce, courteously; and the Squire's face was a puzzle, as he looked from one to the other.

"Do you wish it?" she asked, "do you really wish it?"

"Of course we do," Bruce answered, unable to put a shade of anxiety into his tone. But the Squire noticed the words more than the voice, and decided accordingly; though the hospitality deep-rooted in his nature rose in rebellion to his cold words. "My house is at Miss Gainsford's service as long as she pleases."

"Thanks—oh, thanks, Mr. Bonner, but it is quite impossible. There is a ball on Wednesday night, which I could not miss on any account—a delightful ball."

"Please go on about this word," interrupted Will, his face growing pale at her tactless words.

"Well, I have the word, Mr. Bruce," she said, ignoring Will altogether. "Now our party must adjourn to the library, to distribute and study parts; and then to the scene of action—that is a good name for the place where we act, is it not? Oh yes, really delightful!"

"I will stay with the other set," began Will, as they all crossed the hall: "it is not polite for Bruce and me to be away together."

"If you do, you will spoil it all," exclaimed Miss Gainsford, stamping her foot pettishly, "and I will appeal to Mr. Bonner." So, without waiting for a reply, she hastened to the drawing-room, and, throwing open the door, called out the Squire.

"Please order your youngest son to join us," she said, looking defiantly at Will; "he does not behave well to a lady."

"Impossible he could do otherwise, being a gentleman," said the Squire, turning back, to all appearance very coolly, while Will, laughing heartily, followed the party into the library.

The Hall servants rebelled in secret at Miss Gainsford's multitudinous and impatient orders, and Will, who was most emphatically Acting-manager on this occasion, had to use all his skill to undo the effects of her hastiness. The Saturday was spent entirely in arranging the stage and scenic decorations; a gardener and a couple of footmen, as well as several maids, being kept closely at work by Miss Gainsford.

So the day passed off in bustle and excitement. When Sunday came—one of those calm, soft days that often usher in the dreariest month of all the year,—there was a subdued tone in the conversation at the breakfast-table; a hush upon it like the Sunday hush without; until Miss Gainsford appeared, with her inevitable accompaniment of clatter.

"Miss Gainsford," said the Squire, in his gravest tone, "will you please let the subject of the acting be banished for to-day? We would keep our thoughts free from it, if possible. It will come all the fresher to-morrow."

"Oh! yes, really I will, Mr. Bonner. Certainly; a very good plan indeed; only I must just ask Mr. Everby if he knows that one part. Do you?"

So she managed, at intervals during the day to bring the subject up, and to keep the others in constant dread of the Squire losing his temper under the provocation. And always little Aileen, in her gentle way, came to the rescue. Partly for the sake of getting away, and partly to do a kind act for one of his tenants, the Squire had his phaeton round after service, and started on a lonely drive. But in one of the avenues he overtook Aileen, and, feeling more glad than he cared to confess, he made her mount beside him. In the Sunday peace and quiet, they two drove on, silent very often for long minutes, but when they were not, talking softly and earnestly; not without laughter now and then, but still without any flippancy or scandal.

"That was a pleasure, my dear," said the Squire, as the horses drew up again at the door; and the tone meant much that Aileen did not understand.

* * * * *

"That must have been exactly the expression your namesake

wore before his immortal lesson in spiders," said Will, coming into his brother's room that night, to find him sitting before the fire, gazing into it most dejectedly.

"I'm sick of it all, Will," Bruce answered, peevishly.

"Pleasing sensation, I should say—worse than pluckdom."

"What is to be the end of this?"

"Life, most probably, which 'likewise is the end of all things.'"

"No, but when will this game of yours be over?" asked Bruce, looking up earnestly.

"To-morrow, dear boy," said Will quietly, laying his hand on his brother's shoulder.

"You have been a brick, and it has all succeeded; the governor would forbid the banns if they were put up on Sunday. Go on and prosper, old fellow, for there's only to-morrow!"



Things lay about in such confusion that there was no empty chair or couch obtainable; so Will threw the window open and lounged upon the sill, half in and half out of the room grumbling a little the while.

"I will clear a chair for you if you like—really I will," said Di Gainsford, without stopping in her occupation.

"You look very anxious about it, Miss Gainsford; but don't trouble yourself," he laughed. "There is nothing more ready for me, I suppose?"

"There will be when your brother comes in with the carpenter; just the fixing of this curtain to finish. Have you tried your dress?"

"Yes, I make a perfectly genuine old Falstaff."

"Do you?" answered Di, turning quickly to her work.

"Really, now, I thought you would; the artificial *embonpoint* will be most becoming—delightful, isn't it? Have you seen your brother in his dress?"

"No, not yet."

"Oh! but you should though; he looks really charming—doesn't he, Miss Verney?—a perfect Romeo to my Juliet."

Will flushed angrily. It was so soon to appropriate his brother in this cool manner, and so unmaidenly, too. Aileen's face grew a little whiter. If this were so, could not Miss Gainsford have been more silent and considerate about it?

"Hark! Miss Verney, there is the dressing-bell, and you have not finished that, I do declare."

"Yes, I have!" exclaimed Aileen, jumping up, and exhibiting a long gray beard stuck straight out in front with wires.

"Then run off!" cried Di, in her rapid authoritative way.

Aileen did as she was bid, just as Bruce came in with the carpenter ; but Bruce passed her by unheeded in the doorway, and so her step was slow and heavy on the stairs.

"That is all right now, Mr. Bruce," greeted Di, rapturously "this is the finishing touch. Delightful!"

"If she says 'delightful' once a day, she says it a hundred times," muttered Bruce, as the brothers went to their rooms.



Such a dinner it was, in honour of the Squire's birthday ! So merry and so noisy that Di's chatter was not so noticeable as usual, though she did all in her power to attract attention. She insisted on having the nuts burnt, and each gentleman choosing his own lady ; and she would throw her apple peel over her left shoulder to see what letter it would form. When the Squire's health was proposed, she rattled on about other things, ignoring it altogether, and then apologising afterwards most tastelessly.

After dinner the usual visits were paid by the hosts and guests in a group. First to the barn, which was brilliantly lighted and decorated, and where the lower tenants and the superior servants were sipping their tea and coffee, while the band tuned up preparatory to the dancing ; and here they all joined merrily in the opening dance, leaving the party afterwards in the height of their enjoyment. Then to the servants' hall, where the third party was held. Here they danced one dance again, almost merrier still ; then it was time for the acting to begin.

Those ladies who were simply of the audience laughingly prepared to throw their bouquets, some of them more than jealous of those of their sex who were told off to act love scenes—of course they would be love scenes—with Bruce Bonner and the nicest gentlemen in the house. That was all owing to being an heiress ! Disagreeable as Miss Gainsford was, of course she could do anything she chose, on account of her money. She had taken Aileen Verney with her for propriety's sake ; being so innocent and so poor, there was little fear of Miss Verney's rivalry.

Presently Mr. Everby came forward on the improvised stage, and announced that the word they were about to act consisted of three syllables ; that each syllable would be represented by a scene from Shakspere, and the whole by a *tableau vivant* from real life.

Then the curtain slowly rose on as picturesque a scene as any imagination there had pictured—the often-thought-of, often-represented garden at Verona. Among the splendid plants stood Bruce Bonner, in black velvet, with lace ruffles hanging softly at his neck and wrists, leaning one hand on his silver-hilted sword, and holding in the other his plumed velvet cap, looking every

inch a knight and troubadour, and gazing wistfully round him in the moonlight.

“He jests at scars that never felt a wound.
But—soft!”

At an imaginary window, framed in leaves and flowers, now appeared a head, which was not remarkably like the Juliet of dramatic ideas—a head leaning out eagerly and vacantly, with a large chignon very high upon it, and an enormous camellia crowning that. Below were visible a pair of shoulders, clothed in a heavily-trimmed dress, most emphatically belonging to the fashion of the day. The face of this Juliet was full of a conceit and consciousness which grew upon it as poor Bruce—striving kindly and thoughtfully to act his own part well, and perhaps bringing to his aid another face, remembered only—talked to his unromantic love, with his whole heart in his voice.

“It is my lady; oh, it is my love!
Oh that she knew she were!”

The room was silent as if it were empty.

“See how she leans her cheek upon her hand!
Oh that I were a glove upon that hand,
That I might touch that cheek!”

And the listeners, most of whom knew the scene, waited anxiously to hear how this very un-ideal Juliet would reply. She gave a heavy sigh, more like the sigh of an over-taxed nurse than of a Southern girl just waking to the timid consciousness of love; and then the two piteous words—the “Ah me!” breathed to the quiet night—were given with a jerk. Even Romeo was taken aback for a moment, and almost lost the grand effect of his start and exclamation,

“She speaks!
O speak again, bright angel!”

There was positively a little chuckle rippling through the audience, the term seemed so very inappropriate. The scene went on, Juliet speaking, when she had to speak, as if she were clumsily repeating the words of some invisible prompter behind her, while her eyes kept wandering.

“Thou know’st the mask of night is on my face;
Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
For that which thou hast heard me speak to-night.”

Not only the heartless tone, but the colour on her cheeks, made the speech ridiculous; and the listeners could hardly forbear a laugh as they followed the rapid words, finding no change of voice or expression through the confession of her love, or the appeal—

"Therefore pardon me,
And not impute this yielding to light love."

The scene was undoubtedly improved when she was summoned away for a minute, and Romeo, raising his grave face in the dim light, cried—

"O blessed blessed night. I am afeared,
Being in night, all this is but a dream."

But perhaps the most ludicrous bit of all was when Juliet called him back in a loud and condescending tone—exactly the opposite to that which the little love-sick maiden would have used—and Bruce, almost breaking down at last, answered breathlessly—

"It is my soul that calls upon my name :
How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night,
Like softest music to attending ears !"

Altogether, in spite of Romeo's success, the scene was a failure ; and though the audience applauded him heartily, he knew the truth as well as, or better than, any one. He passed Aileen as he sauntered moodily off the stage, and involuntarily he stopped, looking tenderly down into her pale face.

"How could I say all that to her ?" he whispered.

"You did it very well," she faltered, astonished at his manner.

"It is easier to act upon the stage than off it, Aileen."

"I have never tried either yet," she said, simply.

"I have tried both. 'Oh, it is my love! Oh that she knew she were!' What is that? A bit of my part, isn't it? I keep it up as long as I keep the dress, you see. How do you like the dress?"

Laughing still, he donned the velvet cap with its long white feather, and turned round slowly before her.

"You look just like Romeo," she said, the blush rising again as she criticised the picturesque figure.

"And you——"

"I think we managed admirably—delightfully," exclaimed Bi, coming up to them just then. "Oh, really we did, didn't we?"

There was a very short pause, and the curtain rose on the parlour of an old English inn, where Captain Dale, in the unmistakable character of Prince Hal, topped away cheerily with Mr. Everby as Poins, to whom came in presently old Sir John himself. Was it Will? Could it be Will Bonner?

"Give me a eup of sack, rogue! Is there no virtue extant?"

The elapping and laughter of the audience were general, and the actors waited for a lull, while Will sat and drank, a grave, inimitable representation of the fat knight. This was hearty and involuntary appreciation, and through the scene the repetition of it it stopped him often.

“There live not three good men unhanged in England ; and one of them is fat, and grows old.”

Tears of laughter streamed down the old Squire's face ; the ladies were ashamed of not being able to control theirs, as the account of his encounter began, “a hundred upon poor four of us ;” and then of the two rogues in buckram who set upon him, growing to four, seven, nine, eleven, when the men in Kendal green attacked him from behind, in the heavy darkness. But the best of all was the knight's face when the truth was explained, and the matchless expression of the few words,

“Why, thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules : but beware instinct.”

After the sudden change in voice and face at “But, by the Lord, lads, I am glad you have the money !” the applause was so enthusiastic, and lasted so long after the curtain fell, that it had to be drawn up again upon the thrice, as they sat at their sack.

Bruce slapped his brother heartily on the shoulder as he came into the retiring-room.

“Bravo, bravo, Will !”

“It was as good as our scene, really it was,” cried Di Gainsford, enthusiastically ; but no one answered her remark.

The curtain was up again in a few minutes, disclosing a wild and barren heath, while roaring winds were heard from the depth of the stage, in the pale mysterious light.

Coming slowly into sight, his dress blown in front of him, his head bent, and his hat slouched over his eyes, appeared Mr. Everby, as the Earl of Kent, shouting as if he could not make his voice heard in the wind,

“Who's here beside foul weather ?”

To which Bruce, passing to the other side, muffled in a long cloak, answered disconnectedly—

“One minded like the weather, most unquietly.”

At this Mr. Everby said—

“I know you. Where's the king ?”

Bruce's voice was faint and far off now.

“Contending with the fretful element.”

And, when they disappeared, poor old Lear, his long white beard blown straight in front of him, and groping with his hands held out, tottered on the stage.

“Blow, wind, and crack your cheeks ! rage ! blow !”

This was a success for Captain Dale too—a marked one ; and

when, trying to steady himself, his hands trembling on his drooping grey head, the words came sobbing out,

"'Gainst a head

So old and white as this! Oh! oh! 'tis foul!"

the eyes of one or two of the listeners actually grew dim.

Captain Dale had won his laurels fairly, but the scene was not so rapturously applauded, or so fully appreciated, as the last.

A longer time elapsed before the curtain rose again. When it did so, there was a **hus**! both on and off the stage. The lamps had been turned down, and the stage represented a long, low room, with four narrow beds standing against the wall, in three of which lay sick and wounded soldiers; the head of one wrapped in thick white bandages, and the arm of another strapped on a board. From bed to bed, bending and seeming to whisper to each white face upon the pillow, touching or arranging the bandages with one hand, while she held a small lamp in the other, walked Aileen, in a soft grey dress, a white apron, and a snowy little cap; the touching beauty of her young face enhanced twofold by the dress and the softened light. Each pale face brightened at her coming, though wearily; and, as she left the last pillow, after smoothing it gently, there entered quietly two men bearing a stretcher, on which a young officer, in full regimentals, lay unconscious. She knelt beside him, looked searchingly into his face, and took one helpless hand tenderly, feeling the pulse as she watched. So the curtain dropped. Only for a minute, though; the audience clamoured for it to be raised again, and, for another brief interval, they gazed upon the sad and pretty scene.

The acting was over, and a few had guessed the charade, shouting it eagerly, "Nightingale."

"Ah! so it is," said the Squire. "And if that Miss Gainsford hadn't spoilt her part, the whole would have been perfect." This opinion was of course only whispered in confidence to his sister.

Halt an hour afterwards the actors joined the rest of the party in the hall, where the band was playing gaily; and, though praises and congratulations greeted them all more or less, it was very evident that Miss Gainsford had left on the minds of the audience a very poor impression indeed, and Aileen Verney a very good one. But Di was not to be discouraged by this. She danced a great deal. A good dancer, whatever she might be as an actress, a handsome girl, and an heiress, she could find partners, however absurd she might be; and the evening passed on so pleasantly that November was six hours old when, at last, the Squire's birthday was considered over. A few hours afterwards the train which held Miss Gainsford rolled out of sight of Bonnerghlen, and there was no voice raised to mourn her departure.



"We shall be alone again very soon now, sir; the last of the guests leave us to-morrow, I suppose?"

Bruce had joined his father in his study, for a few minutes chat before he went to bed that night; and very pale the Squire fancied his son looked, as he sat down opposite him.

"Yes, I suppose so, and some of them I shall be very sorry to lose. Little Miss Verney I shall miss sadly."

"Father," said Bruce, anxiously, "would you not like to have her always with you? I am only waiting your consent."

His father looked at him inquiringly for a minute, and then grasped his hand.

"My boy, of course you have my consent. Here's Will, tell him."

Will—guessing it all perfectly well—came sauntering up to the fire, and looked expectantly at Bruce; a very trying look poor Bruce felt it to be.

"Miss Gainsford has accepted you, I presume?"

"I have not asked her," replied Bruce, laughing.

"But you have not actually disobeyed your father—you—the model son!"

"I will have no Miss Gainsford ruling at Bonnerglen," said the Squire, hotly, the more hotly as he saw how provokingly cool Will looked.

"Then you have broken your word, sir, as no true gentleman should do and live. Whom else has Bruce found to marry, with thirty thousand pounds?"

"I don't see that the fortune signifies," said the poor old Squire, suddenly brought to bay; "a good and pretty, and pleasant wife is a fortune in herself."

"And Aileen is that!" put in Bruce, earnestly.

"She is—God bless her!—and you have my full and free consent, my boy."

"I never did see the fun of your having two properties, and my having none," observed Will.

"If you were not so lazy, Will——" began his father.

"I should be more industrious, sir—yes, I believe I should; but I never observed that Bruce did much in the way of work, and I am in favour of division of labour. Why was I born a younger son, and why did you seek out no heiress for me, O my father?"

"What heiress would marry a man who, knowing that a career is open to him, does not move a step towards it? Ask yourself that question, Will."

"I will, sir, and forward you the answer. Good night. I am glad to have liberty to resume my pipe of peace in bachelor quarters."

• • • • •

The next time Will came home, it was for his brother's wedding ; and, the night before the event, father and sons sat together cheerfully enough, though it was the last time ; for Will it seemed almost the breaking up of his boyhood's home.

They had not been talking much, when the Squire, who seemed very tender and affectionate to Will that night, began to ask him about his college life and prospects, which had evidently brightened considerably since his last visit home.

"I have my fellowship, you see, sir, and I hold a very good position among the other men."

"It was only idleness, all the time, my lad."

"And carelessness," Will added ; "the want, too, of a motive."

"Have you a particular motive now, Will ?" asked Bruce.

"Yes, or I fear I could not work as I work now. The fact is, Bruce," Will went on, striving to speak in his usually cool tones, "the fact is, the same influence is at work in me as in yourself. Don't start ; I mean that some one else holds the place in my heart which Aileen holds in yours."

"It seems a good influence, Will," said the Squire, thoughtfully.

"It is indeed a good influence, father ; nothing else could have made me work as I have done. You tried, but you had indulged me too much to begin with ; Bruce tried, but he was rich, and able to be idle himself, so his words had no weight. Now some one else has said that I must obtain a position for myself—as all men can and should—or she will take back the love she has given me. And because I know she is right, and that a man ought to work, to be worthy of his name, and because my life would be a blank, however easily spent without her love, I am working among my books, as you and Bruce work among your tenants and servants ; and I am learning to love my work as I never hoped to do. Do you think the living will be ready in time for me, sir ?"

"Whenever you are ready, my dear boy. But, before you take it, you must have a long holiday abroad, or where you choose ; I always intended that, but I suppose, now, you will wish to take your wife ? Who is she, Will ?"

"You shall know her soon," said Will, with his old coolness.

"We do not know her, then?" asked the Squire, a little anxiously.

"No, sir."

• • • • •

It was the morning of another Hallow-Eve—the second since the memorable visit of Diana Gainsford,—but it was a very small party which was gathered in the morning-room at Bonnerghlen.

No guests were staying in the house this year, and it wa

hours too soon yet for the earliest arrival of those who were to come as usual for the keeping of the Squire's birthday—the Squire's birthday to all intents and purposes to-day, for there was no madcap Irish girl to do away with good old customs, and introduce the observance of her national ceremonies.

The Squire himself, in his arm-chair, and with spectacles on nose, was skimming the cream of the *Times*; looking up now and then to join in the conversation, or to shake his head threateningly at a small person in white, jumping and beating the air in the arms of his uncle Will, who stood on the hearth-rug and tossed him as heedlessly as if his mother—prettier and brighter than ever as wife and mother—had not constantly reminded him of the advisability of taking care.

"I suppose Bruce does not know how to nurse yet," he observed, glancing at his brother, who lounged on the arm of Aileen's chair and laughed at him.

"If I could not manage the art better than that, I should go to college."

"They give us no lectures on tossing babies."

"But babies need not be tossed *quite* all the time," laughed Aileen.

"He snarls if he isn't. Take the little rascal and see."

It was plain to every one that Will was nervous. He, who never found anything awkward or impossible to which he put his hand, failed signally in a weak attempt at nursing his own nephew.

"When are these people coming, Bruce?" he asked abruptly. "Did you do as I proposed about inviting Miss Gainsford?"

"Yes; we asked her, as you wished it so particularly. But what a notion it was of yours!"

"Not at all. I do not see that we could do less, as we are really such old friends. You, being a father now, your safety is pretty well insured. So is mine, considering that I am on the point of marriage myself."

"I shall keep out of her way as much as possible," said the Squire; "though Aileen cannot sneak off as she used to do."

"No," answered Aileen, smiling proudly and happily into her husband's loving eyes; "but I shall not wish it now."

"Of course not," said Will, quietly, "nor will my father wish it, I daresay."

"But, Will," interrupted Bruce, "when will *your* friend arrive—your own affianced wife? We long to see her, and bid her welcome to Bonnerglen."

The morning-room at Bonnerglen was not in the front of the house, so that none of the party had heard the carriage then stopping at the door; and the sudden announcement, "Miss Gainsford!" startled them all.

Eight eyes were fixed upon her as she entered. And these eight eyes saw her advance quietly, with no eyeglasses ; no supercilious curve in her lips ; no stiffness in her bearing. The tall figure was light and elegant in its beautiful dress of velvet and fur ; and the face was shy and bright.

She hesitated a little ; but as the door closed, Will went forward, and taking her in his arms, kissed her twice or thrice before them all.

"Darling," he said, "they have just been telling me how they long to see you, and bid you welcome to Bonnerglen."

Then they knew what it all meant, and they kindly tried to hide their astonishment and welcome her cordially ; but she received their advances very oddly.

"Mr. Bonner," she said, standing before the astonished old Squire, and speaking simply and unaffectedly, "I cannot feel that you have really bidden me welcome until you tell me so. I cannot consider myself at home among you until you receive me willingly ; and you can do neither until you have heard my story." She pushed her hat from a face that was at that moment more than beautiful. "No, thank you, Mrs. Bonner ; I will not take it off until I know whether I am to stay. The station-fly is waiting for me, as I may go back after I have spoken to you all."

She would not turn her eyes to Will ; in all their pride and brilliance they must have drooped a little had she done so.

"More than two years ago, Mr. Bonner," she said, "I met your youngest son in Oxford. I knew him brave-hearted, but wilfully idle ; and, almost against my will, and quite against my better judgment, I loved him. Will, dear Will, be silent, please, until I finish."

She turned a moment, laying her hand on his, but the eyes of her listeners never moved from her radiant, earnest face.

"I loved him, as perhaps you imagine it is not in my power to love, and, girl-like, I tried to hide that I did, though I knew he loved me too. I tried to hide it, not because he was poor and indolent, and I was rich and ambitious, but because I thought, if he really loved me in all earnestness, he would win me in spite of all—ay, work to win me ; and, girl-like, as I said, I wove into a romance, which was to be a secret, my true and honourable love for a true and honourable man. Just after that, as soon as you heard that I was in England again, you thought that I, as you remembered me, the orphan child of twelve years ago—or perhaps my fortune had something to do with it, but I do not say it had—would make a fitting wife for your heir and favourite son. I knew he was your favourite, by what Will had unconsciously told me ; so I knew that you thought it was an honour you paid me, and naturally so, for it is a position any

girl might be proud and glad to fill, that of Bruce Bonner's wife ; and you condescended to select me for it. But women's hearts are self-willed things, Mr. Bonner, and not less free and unfettered when they are laden with a heavy fortune than when they beat, unnoticed and unbargained for, in a poor girl's breast.

"I came at once when you asked me here. Will had told me a little of Miss Verney, I had guessed the rest for myself, and in my own mind I had built a little romance for her too. I hoped to see it realised, and have it to tell Will afterwards ; for I had never expected to find him here. The day before I joined Miss Bonner, to come to Bonnerglen, I received a letter from Will—the first he ever wrote me—in which he told me things were not going happily for his brother ; that you had set your heart upon his marrying an heiress, and that *his* heart was torn, because he loved his father too dearly to disobey him, yet loved a penniless girl too dearly ever to choose any one else. And Will ended his letter—just like him!—by telling me that he should love me always just as he did then, but that he knew I should be courted and wooed by others, rich and noble and altogether attractive, being exactly opposite to himself, and that he would never trouble me with his love, but would go as bravely as he could through life without me, and be as cheerful as possible, when he saw me walking on roses, or gold, or something equally ridiculous.

"Then my mind was made up. No one should court me, no one should admire me. Aileen Verney should see neither a dangerous nor a worthy rival in me ; in short every one should be so surfeited with the heiress that it would be a matter of rejoicing to be rid of her on any terms. And—and, if Will's love lived on through that, I thought, why, it was a love to make me happy to my dying day ! Mr. Bonner, one word more, please. You know how I succeeded ; you know how you all disliked me ; and yet that means Bruce won his own choice—won his sweet little wife, whom I have remembered very lovingly for these two years—and obeyed his father. His father found the blessing of a daughter who can make his home happy, and fill his heart with love ; and Will has found a wayward heart which he alone can tame. Dear friends, can you forgive the means I used, for the sake of the end ?"

They had clustered round her—all but Will. Aileen's eyes were dim amid their gladness, and the old Squire's hands trembled as he laid them on the shoulders of the girl who stood beside him, so strong and brave and resolute, yet with such a yearning tenderness in her bright eyes.

"How could you do it, my child ?" he asked a little brokenly.

"It must have sadly hurt the loving, childlike nature that looks at me from your eyes."

"I got hold of the character wonderfully," said Di with a low, glad laugh; "do you know the great difficulty lay in leaving it off after I went away."

"Did you guess this, Will?" asked his brother, as if he only half comprehended yet.

"Why, knowing her as I had known her, I could not help but guess," he answered, coming forward and meeting her eyes for the first time; "at least, I could not help building my own reasons for her odd style of deportment. The eyeglasses I have never properly mastered to this day. Where are they, Di?"

"Preserved," she said, a laugh upon her lips; "Romeo, you see now that I could act, though I did so caricature Juliet. You could not guess that I wanted to make any love passages between us highly ridiculous in every one's eyes, but especially in Mr Bonner's."

"Just think if we had guessed this," mused the Squire.

"Ah! but you know you never guessed anything in your life, you said. I felt so safe when you told me that, while I persisted in calling your birthday Hallow-Eve. I want to keep Hallow-Eve to-day, too, if you ask me to stay; I want to keep it all in my own way as I did then; and as my last, because next year it will be the father's birthday, that Will and I shall come home to keep. You don't object to my having one more Hallow-Eve, before I leave my Irish girlhood behind me, do you, Mr. Bonner? And please do not let this story be so much as whispered among your guests."

"Why not? Oh! yes, it must be," they answered, simultaneously.

"No, please; you will do this kindness for me. Not to-night. Any time afterwards."

"Will, you are very silent," said his father. "It makes your happiness all the harder to believe in."

Will spoke then, with a new earnestness on his merry face.

"Now, you know, dear father, why I have been working so hard. Not content with making you three happy, my darling made me doubly so; not in her love alone, but in the consciousness—so new to me—of having at last laboured as a man should labour; of having striven and succeeded in one aim which is worthy of a man's strength and energy; and thus she has made me a little worthier of the prize that I have won."

"God bless her!"

It was the Squire who spoke, almost unconsciously; and, with the new tenderness which had grown upon him through these two happy years, he kissed her as he might have kissed a dear child.

Bruce—who seemed almost awaking from a dream—held out his hands, and Di, with a shy little laugh, laid hers in them.

"I never felt so happy in all my life," he said, heartily.

"Oh! yes, you did," she answered, frankly meeting his steady gaze, "and I know when. Aileen, kiss me, my little sister."

Aileen was waiting for that, and from this moment the two girls were sisters indeed.

Said the Squire then, his kind voice shaking a little as he laid his hand on Will's,

"You deceived us, after all, dear lad; you cannot deny it. You said we did not know your affianced wife."

"And do you mean to say you did, sir, until within this hour?"

At this they all laughed, except Di herself, who had hidden her face down on the white dress of the sleeping baby.

The Squire had never had a birthday night like this since those happy ones, long years ago, when his boys' mother walked beside him among their people.

With a ready tact which peculiarly belonged to her, Di Gainsford shattered completely the old unpleasant impression which she had left in the minds of most who were there. She reigned that night without a rival; and, when they joked her about her Hallow-Eve customs; she took it so merrily that it only added to the amusement of the evening. When young Mr. Everby insisted on following the custom she had introduced, and burning the nuts in couples, appealing to her affectedly to choose her companion, she chose with irresistible gravity, and chose the Squire himself.

Will, who always understood exactly the right thing to do, stood aside; polite and attentive to every one, and wonderfully increasing the enjoyment of the evening, but (evidently following her wish) he forced no care or company on Di, only watching her when he could; proud to see her undivided triumph; proud to see her manner to his father, which, in its piquancy and sweetness, charmed the Squire into a young man for that night, even while, for a few minutes he held his tiny grandson in his arms; proud to see how this odd, unselfish act of hers had taken his brother's heart by storm, and how her winning ways could hold it; but proudest of all to reel her lips on his when all was over, and hear her whisper, as the lustrous eyes grew shy and liquid as a child's—

"Will, I said I would win them by my own self alone, without a word of the truth to help me. Have I done it?"

"Indeed you have, my dearest."

"It was a proud and ambitious resolution, as so many of my resolutions are. Will, I am not so confident in my strength, nor so exacting and wilful, when you are near me; that was why I liked you to keep away to-night."

"Your success was complete, dear love. Now they may know."


"So, Will, that being over, I do not care for you to ~~keep~~ away any longer. I have been self-willed for very long ; I have put you off very often ; but I have grown to think that I should be better, perhaps, if you took me in hand soon, as you have proposed so often when I would not listen."

"From here, my darling," asked Will, breathlessly.

"Yes, if they will like it."

So it was, that from the tower of Bonnerglen church rang out one fair November morning, a joyous wedding peal ; and all the country said, as they listened to the promise of the bells, "There can be no doubt about *their* happiness."

Nor was there.



A FEW DAYS.

He had often promised, and as often delayed it upon the slightest excuse: but on my nineteenth birthday, as I sat in the low window of his study, looking out upon the falling leaves, he came up to me quietly, and put a book into my hand.

"The pages are turned, and I have marked what you may read."

He went back to his writing, and I leaned forward in my corner, and opened the book nervously. It was a diary, as I had guessed, so I turned to the first leaf that was doubled, and read in the silent room:—

Monday, July 23rd.—Nat was detained by some kind of a vestry-meeting, so he asked me to go to the station to meet his new pupil; and because it was such a lovely afternoon, I said I would walk through the fields, and Joseph should take the pony-carriage. Letitia was in her greenhouse, rather cramped in her movements, as usual, for it is only like a swollen cucumber-frame, and she has grown quite portly since she came to keep house for Nat. My dear old sister—dear as if our mothers had been one—yes, almost as dear as Nat. She called me as I came out, to ask why I had put on my best hat to walk in the lanes.

"I want to look nice, Lettie. The station-master's wife, you know, is a very stylish person."

"The people will think you very extravagant. They all know what Nat's living is worth, you may be sure."

"This hat cost very little, except an afternoon's work," I answered, turning it round on my hand; if they stare, I will tell them so."

"Put it on, Miss Madeleine; give it every advantage."

I tried not to blush; I tried to turn unconcernedly, as Mr. Cumberland came out of the little shrubby walk.

"Do you like it?" I asked, putting it on, and turning slowly and gravely round to exhibit it.

His eyes danced with fun. "Is it not rather gay for a clergyman's sister?"

"Should I be wiser or better, or do more good, if I took this

out?" I said, touching the little buff feather that curled over the velvet in front; "or would the parish love me better if it were black?"

"They might," Mr. Cumberland answered, with his head on one side. "It is wise to encourage sobriety of attire."

"Just what I tell her," said Lettie; "but now you had better start, May."

"Good-bye, then," and I held out my hand to Errol Cumberland. He took it, looking into my face with a long questioning look, then dropped it with a smile.

"I will come too," he said. "I feel inclined for an early introduction to Master Carson. I'm sure he's thin and studious, and that Nat will work him into a premature grave." And raising his hat to Lettie as he spoke, he passed with me through the gate, and out into the fields.

"So my parishioners are afraid of me, Mr. Cumberland?" I asked, looking up at him.

"I don't know them," he answered, coolly. "Nat's are."

"May I ask why?"

"Because, Miss Madeleine, you go into quiet, orderly houses, and make the children noisy; because you go into sick-rooms and talk, when any one else would be silent; because you address tipsy men when they ought to be treated with silent scorn; because you take restless children out to play in the fields, when it would be more advisable that they should view life from the lofty elevation of a baby's chair; because, in short, you do just the things no other girl would think of doing."

"And it is as much as the gentleman at the Towers can accomplish, to undo the mischief effected by the Rector's sister."

"He cannot undo it."

"But he generously tries, I have no doubt," I said; and then we laughed and argued, half in jest, half in earnest, until we turned into the shady lane about a mile from the station. After a time, when he began to tell me of things he wished and intended to do, I grew silent, for I could not help feeling my helplessness and his great power; until at last I told him—rather passionately, I'm afraid—that it was unkind to show me the pleasure which was out of my reach.

"Why out of your reach?"

"You know—you know how poor we are."

"Poor? I look upon Nat Blackwood as the wealthiest man in this county, or the next."

He had said it rather nervously, but when I looked up to ask why, he would not answer. I dropped the subject, for I am sure it is painful to him, because his father is so rich and so miserly—doing nothing, and helping no one. Poor Errol! But what great good he will do when the power is his!

"Well?" he asked, looking down at me questioningly.

"I don't mind it at all, so long as the people love him: and they cannot help loving Nat."

We sauntered on among the wild roses. His voice was very grave when he asked, after a little pause,

"Is it because they cannot help it that they love his sister too?"

"If they do, **it is** because they are very kind and very warm-hearted."

"Or is it," he continued, with a new look in his eyes, "because she comes to everybody like a pleasant light? Madeleine, my love, my darling, come and help me too!"

I stood before him trembling, my eyes fixed on him with a questioning incredulity, almost afraid of that anxious look upon his face.

"Mayda, I have loved you for a long, long time; I cannot tell you how dearly. Speak to me one word, my gentle love."

But I could not. I could only cover my face, too much surprised to be even glad or grateful. He took my hands down gently, and laid my head upon his breast, then whispered,

"Can you understand the love I bear you?"

"No; it is all unreal. I cannot believe it yet. Errol, can you *really* love me so?" I rested a moment, silent in my overpowering happiness; then I asked him nervously, and rather incoherently, Did he know what he had done? Had he thought what he had done?

"I have thought," he answered, with a bright, glad smile, "that, unless this wayward little girl will be my wife, I care not what becomes of me."

We had stood some minutes on the platform before the train came lazily up—not even an engine will hurry through Ashley.

"There he is," I whispered, "stout and pale, pensively refreshing himself upon seedcake. Stay and see if he rouses himself to look for anybody."

The boy, pocketing carefully the remains of his cake, looked round rather anxiously, as he left his seat.

"Are you Ben Carson?" I asked, going forward, and holding out my hand.

"Yes."

"That's right. I'm Mr. Blackwood's sister, and am come to take you home—to Ashley Rectory."

Errol came and settled us comfortably in the pony-carriage, saying a few light, pleasant words to this apparently heavy and unpleasant boy; then, as he put the rug round me, he told me, with a proud, gentle smile, to drive carefully, for he had an interest in the carriage now.

I cannot say we any of us much admire Ben Carson yet.

Viewed artistically, he is ungraceful ; viewed domestically, he appears insatiable ; but it is hard to judge him to-night, poor little fellow. I daresay presently we shall like him very much ; I will try to make his new home pleasant to him, though Nat would do that for any one. It was such a quiet, peaceful night, that, after tea, Nat and I strolled out together, and walked up and down the lawn, arm-in-arm, while I told him of my joy. He kissed me ; then he told me he had seen it for a long time, and that Errol would be very happy. He went in soon after, and I followed, to see that Ben went comfortably to bed. Then the resting twilight tempted me once more, and taking up the first hat I saw, which happened to be Nat's, I put it on, and wandered down the little lawn again. I started, hearing the gate open, and then stood face to face with Errol. He bent down to my face laughing.

"Another new hat ! My poor income will melt directly, in this extravagance, Miss Blackwood."

"Now, Errol, could I have a more serviceable article than this ? Why, I was just thinking how it would please the parish in general."

"And the Lord of the Manor in particular ?"

"*Being* particular, yes. Does it ?"

He bent down still lower, with my hands in his, his words so low and quick, I could hardly understand.

"Madelaine, I could not rest in my happiness. I was obliged to come and hear it once more. To think that the weary suspense is over, and that to-day has brought me my blessing ! Oh ! I thank God again and again for my darling's love ! Speak to me, sweet-heart, that I may know all this is real !"

"I am very real, Errol, here beside you, telling you how happy your love has made me."

We stood a long time silent, I looking off among the trees to where the moon was rising ; he—ah ! well, I had learned long ago to know when his eyes were on me, though I had so lately learned the meaning of their earnest gaze. Presently I said, looking up with a smile—a faint half-smile it was, for his great earnestness made me feel grave and quiet—

"You never asked how we got home."

"Well, I conclude by your mentioning the pupil, that he is a pupil still, and not a mangled remains. What did you do with the infant phenomenon ?"

"Discoursed freely and intelligently, then made fast friends over an amateur boar-hunt."

"What do you mean ?"

"Why, the pig had admitted himself gratuitously into the garden, so we devoted ourselves to him on our arrival, and we shall never be stiff again. He is a nice boy, I do believe, with

a good, honest, truthful nature, but not an enlightened young person. Just fancy my feelings when, after insanely trying to make conversation by asking him how he liked Cornwall—of which he could have but a limited experience, the first hour of his acquaintance, could he?—he told me he had spent his last holidays in Dublin, but that he so little relished his sensations on the journey that, if he ever went again, he should certainly go by land! Don't laugh; I did not. I must run in now. Good night—yes, I *must* go."

But yet I stood and watched him out of sight. There was a strange gentleness everywhere on everything to-night, and though I write now how handsome he looked in the fading twilight, that was not my thought as he turned for his last nod and good-bye.

Monday, August 6th.—Errol came over to walk with me to the school, as it is the day I give the children a singing-lesson; and while we waited for the work Letitia was preparing and which we were to take, we sauntered in the kitchen-garden, regaling ourselves on gooseberries. Somehow the conversation turned upon old Mr. Cumberland, and the little he gives away.

"Is he angry with you for what *you* give away, Errol?"

"Always."

"Then you must be scolded a great deal. But I suppose men don't mind."

"Were you ever scolded, Mayda?"

"Tremendously often."

"By whom?"

"You know a name that might be set to the music of a sneeze?"

And then I said it in a sneeze, so naturally that Letitia answered from the garden, and joined us while we were laughing.

"Now, Errol, come to the warbling, and then you must question the boys."

"May I question the girls too, including yourself?"

"It would not be a very brilliant examination to-day. Why, Errol, life itself is a burden almost too heavy to be borne this weather. My little mind (though a kingdom, too, in its way) would close itself to all your logic, in this sun. The shadow of the honour would be more acceptable."

After all, I don't believe we thought much of the heat on the road, and as we came back the other way, the cool, fresh breeze blew on us from the sea. The old grand walk over the cliffs: the old Summer sunshine lying lazily on the cove; the old game of frightening each other among the rocks, by our daring, out upon the points; the old goodly view of still white ships as we sat resting on the heather, looking out across the Channel; the

old, old thoughts and fancies, perhaps, as we stood, where we always stop involuntarily, among the furze and flowers, where we can see miles of land and sea, all beautiful and at rest, on a Summer evening such as this. We gazed and loitered, unwilling, in this bright and pleasant light, to bring our walk to an end. But we reached the Rectory gate at last, and said good-bye. Before he closed the gate, Errol called me back.

"Mayda, you make me forget everything. Mrs. Mark has made up her mind at last; she is bringing her daughter to Ashley Cottage after all. She says the advantages of the sea-air will counterbalance the inconveniences she anticipates; but I wonder what they are to be, for the cottage is one of the most perfect little places I know. They arrive this evening, and I have the pleasant task of the reception."

"I suppose they will be with you a great deal?"

"I suppose so."

"Don't they say Miss Mark is very beautiful?"

"Most beautiful. Madeleine, run down to the gate to-night after tea. I must only be away a minute. Good-bye."

When tea was over; Lettie sitting at the open window, making the most of the fading light; Nat playing, as he generally does before his night's writing begins; and Ben gone up to bed, not feeling very well; I stole out and ran down to the gate. Errol was coming along the lane, whistling softly.

"Ah! little white ghost, shall you vanish if I touch you? Mayda" (his voice changed suddenly), "can I bind you to me more closely than you *are* bound?"

"Never, Errol."

"Then we will not look upon it in that light; but I am so proud of my gift—so proud of my blessing, that I would show every one that I have won it, and hold it mine." He had taken my left hand in his, and put a ring upon my finger; then he gave it a long kiss. "Let it stay until I put another in its place." And I had said nothing when he had turned to go.

"They are come," he called out carelessly, knowing my cheeks were too hot for me to venture to look up. "I hardly saw them properly, but I fancy Ida is as beautiful as report saith." Then he was gone.

With a burning face, I stood beside Nat at the piano, and laid the hand, with the diamonds on it, upon his. He touched it gently, but his face was rather sad.

"Madeleine, you will have no money troubles then, as you have had with me. But I think Nature has made a mistake, dear; you should have married a poor man, just to show how poverty may be brightened."

We joined Lettie, and she kissed me too, and said a few kind words; then I went upstairs with a cooling draught for Ben.

He was lying dressed upon his bed, humming—with very little tune, I must confess—"Oh dear, what can the matter be?" Thinking it would be rather difficult to tell, I persuaded him to get into bed. And now that the house is still, I can hear his breathing, quick and irregular even in his sleep—for I am writing at his bedside. I could not rest if I fancied him wakeful and in pain, poor boy. The light, half hidden, shines upon my diamonds, and their brightness is in my heart. I pray that God will help me to grow worthy of the love they tell of!

Wednesday, August 8th.—Ben is worse, but Dr. Peters is very re-assuring, and says he is not at all surprised at the way the poor boy wanders in his talk. I told him how Ben is perpetually fancying himself Christian on his pilgrimage, and that he cannot get the wicket-gate open; but he only laughed. This afternoon Nat called at Ashley Cottage. He says the rooms are most comfortable, but that Mrs. Mark complains a good deal; surely she need not, in that pleasant spot! He thinks Miss Mark very lovely, but cold and stiff. I'm afraid I cannot like her, if she is. Errol was there when he went, and he left him there. Of course he is trying to make them feel less strange. I did not expect him to call here to-day.

Saturday, August 11th.—Letitia and I went to-day to call on Mrs. Mark and her daughter. I think they were very disagreeable, and I should like never to call again. I am sure they were laughing at Lettie all the time; they could not do so at me very easily, as I kept my eyes very wide open, and fixed upon one or the other of them. They told us they thought they should find it very dull here, having no entertaining ladies in the neighbourhood. I knew they meant no ladies who would entertain them with dinners and dances, and I thought for one moment of the little dining-room at home, and the small dishes that Lettie helps to cook, and then I longed to take her away from their contempt.

We maintained a daintily-iced conversation, until Lettie discovered as a brilliant idea, that she knew a lady whose name they mentioned, and she talked of her in her out-spoken, warm-hearted way. Miss Mark gently laid more ice upon the subject, and disparaged several more poor unoffending people; so that it was an intense relief when Errol became the subject of conversation, because they praised him energetically. Mrs. Mark seems to have very few ideas apart from her pride and her daughter—I think, indeed, the one word might express the two. I was amused to see the way she watched and waited on her, as I was shocked to see the way Ida slighted and contradicted her; and I am afraid I hated her when I felt that she was lovely enough to excuse her pride, as she came out with us, smiling now,

in her trailing white dress and soft bright ribbons—so different from me in my plain blue calico. For one minute there was a bitter longing and rebelling in my heart as I felt this difference, and knew how any one must notice it ; any one meeting us there, for instance. But better thoughts came soon ; and as the foot-steps which I knew so well drew near, I stood more closely still beside her. Erröl hastened up to her and shook hands ; hardly turning his eyes from her face, even while he afterwards greeted Lettie and me. Then as we passed through the gate, he raised his hat to us, and walked in with her. Who can wonder ? We were rather quiet on our way home, and I went at once to Ben's room, where he is performing a slow recovery. He greeted me cheerfully.

"Miss May, I'm so glad you are come. What do you think I have been doing ? Making something."

"Not a mistake, I hope ?"

"No, a poem."

"Have you really ? Show it to me."

"I haven't written it ; I must tell it to you—

"When the whispering wind is weary, and lies resting in its race,
Then I murmur for Miss Madeleine, with her fair and funny face."

"Oh, famous ! Why, Ben, every line is alliteration."

He smiled complacently.

"Not only alliteration, Miss May, but the words all begin with the same letter."

I laughed outright ; but Ben is too good-natured to feel hurt at that. When I recovered, I asked him anxiously, if he had ever published any poetry ?

"Not quite, Miss May. I sent some to a magazine."

"And didn't they put it in ?"

"No ; I don't think they had room just then."

"Was it pretty ?"

"I think so ; it was about a girl."

"Most poems are, Ben ; and did you send it anonymously ?"

As usual, it was only for a moment that Ben was baffled by the word he did not understand.

"Well, yes—*rather* anonymously, Miss May ;" and I was fain to lay my head upon the bed, and laugh once more. How long, I wonder, will it take Nat to teach him not to make meanings for himself ? I raised my head, and asked, more gravely than I meant to do,

"And so I have a funny face, Ben, have I ?"

"Fair *and* funny. Don't leave any of it out, please."

"Do you like it, Ben ?"

"Don't I, and doesn't everybody ? And, Miss Madeleine,"—Ben lowered his voice gravely—"doesn't a certain person think

it the fairest in all the world, even if he doesn't think it the funniest, as I do? He loves you just as well as I do."

I smiled a little.

"And, Ben, if *he*—left off caring for my face, you would too, I suppose?"

"I should love it more."

"Why?"

"Because—I don't know, but it would have a different look I think."

"More funny?"

"Less funny. But, Miss May, look up! He told me, if I troubled you, he should take you away, for that he would not have a care upon the fairest face in all the world; and I know he has seen all the great actresses and the princesses."

I hid my face, laughing, once more, a laugh always does me good, so it must have been *that* of course which sent me down to dinner hungry and happy. I wonder why Nat seemed so vexed that Errol had neglected some appointment with him; he always used to make ready excuses for him in such a case.

I sat with Ben in the evening; and when I went down to make the tea, I put a bright little rose in my hair, and felt quite sure that somebody would come,—as he did. And I dare say we were earlier than usual, or he would have come at the beginning of tea instead of nearly at the end. He was merry and gentle as ever; it was only my fancy which made him seem absent. He did not mention the Marks at first; when he did, he asked me how I had enjoyed my visit.

"I *have* enjoyed things more, once or twice."

"Why?"

"I am afraid I was not sufficiently impressed with the companionship of High Society, fully to appreciate the honour; besides which I caused High Society to blush."

"Mayda!"

"And yet, no. I remember it did not blush; I remarked, on the contrary, that High Society was so perfectly satisfied with its own height, and so very much too lofty to see small things below it, that it was impossible for it to feel the very sharp and painful kicks it sometimes gave to said small things."

"But, May," said Nat, gently, "you would never speak ill of those whom One, who knows best of all what places we can fill, has set above you—simply because they *are* above you?"

"Ah! no, indeed; indeed. Many of them, most of them, are as much above the petty faults and meannesses of life as they are above its wants and cares."

I hardly knew what I said, thinking of them, and then of one beside me, higher still, and yet so different. But the subject did not drop there; Errol began praising Ida's beauty.

"She reminds me," he said, presently, glancing, I thought rather nervously, towards Nat, "of the Old Testament women."

"Of Jael, or Jezebel?" I asked, pretending to be engrossed with the sugar for Nat's fourth cup.

"Madeleine!" Lettie looked reprovingly, but Errol went on, only a little put out by my interruption.

"She reminds me of Rachel, I think, and those other grand Old Testament women."

"I hope Miss Mark is not like the generality of them," I said. "Would she steal like Rachel, or tell falsehoods like Sarah, or teach her son to do it, like Rebecca, or hanker after the evil like Mrs. Lot, or——"

Nat's eyes stopped me, "Madeleine, you are forgetting yourself."

I gave a little forced laugh.

"No, I'm not, Nat dear, only—wherein lies the likeness to Miss Mark, Errol?"

"I mean in appearance only. With that thick, dark hair, and those long Eastern eyes, she is exactly like the pictures we see of Rebecca, or Ruth, or, as I said before, the generality of the Old Testament women."

"In all of whom," said Nat, quietly. "there was good enough to redeem the evil, which, in itself, generally answered some great purpose of the Divine will."

I remember little else that was said, but Errol's manner was very gentle and quiet when he left us. Ah, me! my little rose is faded, and I am very tired!

Sunday, August 12th.—Perhaps it was because my thoughts have lately been running a good deal on the decorations I contemplated for the Harvest Thanksgiving, and my eyes have grown accustomed to look upon all green luxuriance with an eye to wreaths and arches, that this morning—as I turned over my music to find a pretty Voluntary, with some vain idea of showing off more than usual—as I glanced at the arched door I fancied some one had sent me a supply towards my decorations at rather an unseemly hour. Only for a moment, I suppose, for I soon distinguished Mrs. Mark's face below the verdure, and a pair of broad green ribbons attaching it to her venerable chin. I laid my hands on the keys, hurriedly then, that I might not look further; and I played Mozart's *Benedictus* with a nervous trembling in my fingers that I never knew before. Nat was reading the Second Lesson before I looked into the large pew near me. If I thought her beautiful yesterday, I must think her doubly so to-day, in her bright, elegant dress, the wonderful dark lashes lying on her pale cheeks, as she bent her eyes upon her book. I ought to be ashamed even to write it here, but I gave my old

lavender muslin an angry look, behind the harmonium, and then, catching sight of a well-developed patch, I felt an angry lump rise in my throat, and I tapped my foot impatiently as I tried to keep back a wicked tear. I never listened to Nat's sermon this morning. Why couldn't I? But somehow, when he gave out the words,—“And Moses drew near unto the great darkness where God was”—I fell to wondering if it must be *always* so. Is it only in the great darkness that we draw near unto Him? And wondering that, and fearing that it was so, but hoping that he would be in *every* darkness, I grew so lost in my own thoughts, that I hardly know at all what Nat said of it. Errol sat opposite me in his old corner in the great pew, and his face had a flush upon it, and his eyes were restless, and he only looked at me once, and that was when I played a fearful chord in the *Venite*, and put all the singers out. The Marks stopped in the churchyard for the carriage, and when Nat told them he was going over to preach at Little Ashley in the afternoon, Errol said, in his old, impulsive way, that he would walk over too. I asked Miss Mark if she were going. “Thanks,” she said, coldly, “I do not think I shall care to go so far.” Then I knew, quite well, that I should not see the face I loved there, though he had said it. I tried to think the walk to Little Ashley as pleasant as in the old times; and I leaned upon Nat's arm, and laughed and talked with him, and we fell at last into one of those serious, quiet conversations that I love so well. The country had that resting look upon it that it has on Summer Sundays, and the peace of it was in our hearts. We stood a long time looking across the sea, while the churchbells chimed in the distance. I wonder why it is that looking on the sea always stills my hot, rebellious feelings. Is it because it ever must re-echo the wondrous “Peace, be still,” breathed once above it, and which cannot die?—or is it that, as I have often fancied, the Spirit of God *still* moves upon the face of the waters? Certainly peace and rest come to me always from the sea. Why should I feel unhappy as I do? 'Tis only seven short weeks since Errol Cumberland, the truest gentleman in all the land, asked me for my love, and gave me his. Could the love he gave have died so suddenly? Could mine? But I must not judge him by that test. How could I ever be tempted as he is?

As usual, something happened in church to lower me in the estimation of the congregation. We were singing very slowly and impressively, when some one, feeling the church too warm, opened the door; and immediately, with a stately step and lofty bearing, in walked Brutus, whom I had deposited so carefully inside the Vicarage yard to wait for us. He walked up the aisle, sniffing inquisitively, my heart sinking lower at each step he took. Our door was unlatched, so he coolly pushed it open,

walked in, and stood in the middle of the pew. Then he listened attentively for a few minutes ; but the words we sang, or probably the tune, not meeting with his approbation, he raised his head, and gave a long, low whine, which I believe he would have kept up through the hymn, only that Mrs. Topham, driven apparently to distraction, took up a cushion and chased him. He looked calmly at her, while he finished his wail in a minor key, then he took refuge at my side. Mrs. Topham followed him up, and I kept my eyes on my book, singing serenely, and left the little affair for her to settle. The cushion was in action again, Brutus driven out of the pew, and the door shut. Poor Nat must have been very angry, as of course he would not feel inclined to laugh in the pulpit, and Ben would undoubtedly have made a diversion, had he not been peacefully slumbering.

I am writing early to-night. I don't think Errol will come in to tea ; perhaps he may, but I daresay he is at the Cottage, as he knows they find it lonely. It was so hard to sit downstairs, and not to listen for him, that I came away to write. Lettie is reclining, in a suspicious manner, on the couch, with a comfortable droop in her features, and little strange sounds issuing apparently from the back of her neck. Nat, too, is enveloped in a lethargy more nearly bordering on somnolence than I should have expected in a person of his parts. So it is better not to rouse them for tea just yet. I will wait a little longer.

I wonder what they are doing over there at the Cottage ? The grand old trees around the Towers hide them all from me. Is that the only separation between my life and theirs ?

When I had written so far, I went down, for I heard a step I knew, and in the drawing-room, against the window in the sunset light, stood Errol, in evening dress, so handsome, with the restless brilliancy in his eyes, and yet it was this very brilliancy which made him look unlike the Errol Cumberland of old.

"I came for a little talk, Mayda, as I could not go to church. May I have tea with you ?" And as I took the keys and made it, my heart was light with happiness.

I told him of my misadventure in Little Ashley Church and he laughed that low, clear laugh of his which tempts one so to join in it ; then he bent his bright face over my dog, and looked gravely into the intelligent eyes that always brighten at a word from him—

"Et tu, Brute !"

The serious words came so unexpectedly that Nat started, which made the laugh all the merrier, and we were very cheerful and happy until tea was over, when Errol seemed to grow absent and quiet. Presently he said, the flush coming back to his face, "You did not say many words to Miss Mark this morning, Madeleine."

"Yes, I did, just twice as many as she said to me."

"She is the stranger. You are expected to take the initiative."

"Am I not a stranger too—to her, Errol?"

"But you are at home here; besides, you are never shy."

"Yes, I am—with Miss Mark."

"Why?"

"Because she didn't like my bonnet—or dress—or gloves."

"Nonsense; why should you fancy such things?"

"I don't fancy it. I saw it in the elevation of her nostrils; and why did she bow when she went, and not touch my hand?"

"Why, May, this is not pride. People seldom shake hands at first sight, in the society to which she is accustomed."

"But this is second sight, and I know it was the gloves, and I don't care for her, but she is very, very beautiful." I felt hot and angry, and brought out each sentence with a jerk.

"She is indeed," he answered eagerly, "more beautiful than any one I ever saw; is she not, Nat?"

"I don't know all the people you ever saw," said Nat, coldly.

"But is not Miss Mark very beautiful?"

"I would rather have her head in marble at once; then I should not have the disappointment of expecting a change which never comes. I got very weary of its sameness this morning; and I should not care a bit about my sermons if all my congregation looked so."

"May," said Errol, rather abruptly, "will you come with us to Porthwith on Tuesday? Ida and I ride, Mrs. Mark and my father drive. Which will you do?"

I felt my eyes burning, as if the lids would never close over them again; but I hope I answered naturally, when I declined to go at all. He urged me a little, but soon dropped the subject, and rose to go.

"You will come to the Towers and meet Ida often, won't you? The more you know of her, the more you will like her."

"I hope so. Yes, I will come."

Then he went. The sunset light was gone, leaving the room full of a strange, sad twilight; and the grand old sacred melodies Nat played sounded to me like mournful cries for something lost; I could bear it no longer, and came to write away my gloomy and impatient thoughts.

Thursday, August 23rd.—The days have passed so monotonously during the last fortnight, that I was glad, this morning, to think that to-day would bring the change of the school-treat; although last night I had a weary wish that it were over.

I rose at dawn to look anxiously at the sky, and, standing at my window, prayed a little prayer for the children's pleasure;

and then I asked Him, who knows how hard some little things are to bear, to take me out of myself to-day.

Ben is getting well rapidly ; he is wonderfully improved, and has almost a blithe expression of countenance.

Nat is looking anxious and troubled. He says it is the heat ; but the last few days have not been very hot, and still he looks anxious. Lettie was very busy all the morning cutting cake. I proposed borrowing the machine with which they cut the bread at the workhouse, and settling Ben to it ; but she did not seem to consider it a good plan, and slighted my generous offer of making it all right to-morrow with the board. I spent my morning in preparing games to be played, and prizes to be won ; Ben in setting hurdles for the boys to jump.

The Bents and Leslies came to lunch, then the children arrived, and at the same time the carriage from the Towers came dashing up to the door with the Marks and Errol.

Errol jumped down and gave his hand to Mrs. Mark, who stood, after hurriedly speaking to us, to beg her daughter not to wait about in the sun, nor to walk too much, nor to—— Oh, I don't know what ; but I'm afraid I gave a little stamp when she turned at last to explain that "Ida was so fragile."

"I will take care that she is obedient, Mrs. Mark," said Errol, gaily, as he handed her down, with a laughing intent look into her face.

Mrs. Bent led Mrs. Mark to the field, where we made her comfortable under a tree, and where, as she said, she could watch dear Ida as well as the children. I hope she found it pleasant !

"Now, Madeleine," said Errol, as he came up to me with Ida, "what shall we do to make ourselves generally amiable ?"

"It is too hot for anything very energetic," added Miss Mark, looking more lively than I had ever seen her look before.

"Would you like a seat in the shade ?" I asked, wishing to make it as little unpleasant as possible, and feeling that she would not care for this kind of thing.

"No, thank you ; I will watch them playing. Your brother seems very attentive and kind to the children. Don't let me keep you."

So I went, and left them ; and if I remembered, rather sadly, who was the life of every game a year ago, I tried very hard to forget it again. Errol played a little, but I suppose he felt that Ida Mark was in his charge, and so he was a great deal at her side.

No use now my crushing it down and trying to hide it ; no use my laughing so carelessly to Nat, or beating down my pride. I know it. I see it plainly. He follows her blindly, with hardly one thought for any one besides—infatuated, powerless ; and I will not mind. They are suited to each other ; both beautiful,

high-born, and rich ; and so, God helping me, I will stand aside and see them happy. But I determined only to write of the day itself, for my strength is wavering yet.

I said the evening went off well ; to say that the tea and cakes did so too would be but a mild way of describing their rapid disappearance. The children cheered us all, then sang the National Anthem in loyal style ; and if it diverged into several distinct keys, I am sure it was nobody's fault in particular, though of course it happened that Miss Mark asked, at a crisis, who taught the singing ; and the ready answer, "Miss Madeleine Blackwood," seemed to me more terrible than all the discord. While I stood a little behind, I tried to put them right again ; but I had to stop, feeling my voice tremble. Errol, who stood in the group, touched me, and whispered, in his gentle way—

"You are tired, Mayda ; you have done too much."

My face, when I raised it, must have looked very weary, for his eyes saddened as they looked into mine ; and as the last note—sustained, during a lengthened period, by one small child—died away, he said merrily, applauding.

"Famous ! Why, I felt hopeless about harmony when I contemplated the chief singers enjoying their seventh distribution of tea. How they can sing upon it I would give a song to know ; wouldn't you, Miss Blackwood ?"

Lettie laughingly turned to Mrs. Mark, who, feeling she ought at any rate to pretend to take an interest in something, said,

"Yes, very noisy indeed, they are."

I think I enjoyed our tea out upon the lawn ; it was such a lovely evening, and the day's work so nearly over. The servants were playing with the children, so we waited on ourselves, and Nat was so thoughtful, and Ben so active, that there was very little trouble. Errol began very gallantly, but he soon forgot himself in his gay talk with Ida—was it at all like his old talk ? They were going to dine at the Towers, so they left earlier than they would have done.

After we had dismissed the children, we stood resting a few minutes at the gate. Presently a group of miners flocked past, with anxious faces.

"Have you heard, sir ? There has been an accident at the Great Ashley Mine—the engineer smothered."

Nat was gone before we had even understood, and we trembled as we waited for we knew not what, until at last the men, who had crowded to the spot, went slowly past the Rectory gate, answering only by one word when we stopped them for a moment. They had found him standing as he had been buried under the falling earth, his pocket-book and pencil in his hands. It had been done very quickly, thank God. The Autumn twilight gathered round us, but far away there were "the reapers singing

as they carried home their sheaves"; and at last, far away too, we saw the miners—ah! well, not singing—as they carried home *their* burden. "Some must work while others weep; thus runs the world away." Runs to those who work perhaps, but surely erecps to those who weep!

Nat was more stern to-night, I think, than I have ever seen him, and his voice was low with passion when he said to Lettie,

"Cumberland should have been there; the mine is his."

"But you were better, Nat," I said, coming up to them.

"Need I have been absent for him to go?"

I said no more, for fear; and I am come to bed feeling, I think, for the first time in my life, discontented with my brother. What shall I do to be patient in this dreariness? Are there any to mourn for him who died so sadly and so suddenly to-day? How can I learn to remember always that His tender mercy is over *all* His works?

Wednesday, September 5th.—Is it harder to bear than it was yesterday? We say suspense is worst of all. Ah! no; this is hardest.

Nat and Lettie wished me to go to the archery meeting at the Towers to-day, else I would rather have stayed at home with them. It was a gay and beautiful sight. Everybody was very kind to me, and I enjoyed the shooting as usual. When the contest was over, we separated, to walk through the grounds. I strolled with the Leslies to that wild part of the park where the trees open to a view of the sea and the cliffs below them. When we were half-way back again, I left them quietly, and returned, thinking how pleasant a few minutes there alone would be. I sat down, leaning against a burly old pollard facing the wide, quiet sea, and in the perfect stillness there was infinite peace. I had sat, I think, a long time, and was going to rise, when I heard voices coming towards me, and I drew back, thinking I would rather not be found there alone. I don't know why I should have minded it, but I did. They came closer, and I recognised them—Errol's and Ida's. She was speaking in the slow, monotonous tone that never had moved me to one warm, loving feeling for her.

"But I do think it so, really. I don't remember ever having seen a more beautiful place. You must be very proud of it, Mr. Cumberland."

"I am very proud of it to-day; for it is beautiful as it never was before."

"Why so?" Her voice had no change in it, but I felt how lovely she must look as she turned to him. And the sea-birds flew in the distance, and I was watching them.

"You know, Ida"—There was no monotony in *his* voice, it was eager and excited—"and if it might have this beauty always, I could indeed be proud. Can it—shall it?"

I gave no time for thought; I will not stop to think even now what would have been better—as I did not stop then. I rose slowly and joined them, never looking at her, though I saw so plainly in her face all that he could wish to see, in answer to his words. I stood by them, more quiet and still, I think, than I had ever stood beside him before.

"I have stayed behind my party watching the gulls. I thought this such a pleasant spot, Mr. Cumberland; but I'm tired of it now."

I looked into his eyes. They read all I had left unsaid; yet they had a light in them that I did not like. Mine had a change in them too, I'm sure, with all my steadiness.

"Miss Mark, will you examine this wild little spot, as you wished, while I take Miss Blackwood to a place of which she is not tired?"

How could he say it? She sat down almost where I had done, and Errol followed me as I walked silently away. When we came in sight of the party on the archery ground, we were turning away from the steep, rocky declivity on our left; then I stopped.

"Errol," I said, drawing off my glove, and trying not to let my voice or my hand tremble, "before you go back I will make it easier still. There, it is no sin now. You are free to receive her answer." I drew the false and glittering diamonds from the finger on which he had put them, and threw them down among the stones and brambles, a hundred feet below us. He never spoke or moved; no agony or trouble was in his face; only a passing cloud; and before I was out of sight he had turned to rejoin her. I had gone with the Leslies, so I could not leave until they did. Shall I be called upon to spend many such weary times as that? Two lines which I have somewhere read are strangely haunting me to-night. "God has established the thing; no complaining will unestablish it." If He has established it, it must be best.

Oh! if I were only like Nat—"content with Him!"

That reminds me, he and Lettie have quite decided that I am to go to Ireland to Aunt Bessie. He is to take me on Wednesday, and I will try that it shall do me good, as Lettie says—but in mere ways than she can mean.

Tuesday September 11th.—To-morrow we start on our journey, and I am glad now that I am going. Sometimes the air here seems to stifle me, and I feel as if I could not breathe until I climb the hills around us. I have said good-bye to all but those

at home; that will be the worst part of all. I don't know how I shall say it to Lettie and Ben to-morrow. Poor Ben, he is not so studious, even yet, as he might be. Nat grew rather stern with him after he got well, and insisted on his getting up early in the mornings to study. So I went to call him, and wait at the door until I heard him up—knowing so well his weakness on that point—but, to my great surprise, he never even then appeared when I expected him, and had everything ready for his lessons. So I pressed to know how this could be, and at last he owned it to me confidentially. “Well, Miss May, I do generally first get into bed again for a minute, just to warm my feet.” The idea was so novel I could only laugh; but I had to think of another expedient, and now I wait at his door until he assures me that he has thoroughly unmade his bed.

Lettie and I had a day's shopping yesterday, a thing I do dislike beyond all things. We went through the usual process of marching, with a business-like and absorbed expression on our faces, up an avenue of men in clerical costume—a good deal more glossy than poor Nat's—all so painfully devoted to our interest, that I look upon it as a duty to purchase what they condescend to select, even if I am unfortunate enough to have been previously led away by something else. But I did not buy another gay hat, even though—to my great surprise—Lettie tried to persuade me; and I don't remember ever before having chosen a dark brown dress.

Good-bye, my little book, till I come home. I could not write anywhere but here.

The moonlight sleeps upon the towers and upon us. The gentle kindness of Our Father watches over both.

Oh! Errol, Errol, away in Ireland, I will pray—as I pray now—for your perfect happiness!



Tuesday, October 30th.—Home again! and very glad to be so though at present suffering from a recent affliction. The hours I spent between Dublin and Bristol, though to unprejudiced ears they sound so few, had the agony of a month condensed into them; and I felt the passage as rough as ever, when I sat in the drawing-room to-night, trying to persuade myself that the lamp did not sway; trying to forget that stifling, indescribable smell of cabin and brandy, and the voices of strong men over my head, who never thought of being ill; and brisk stewardesses who walked at critical moments, as if nothing were happening. All to no purpose; and I think I must decide, like Ben, to go to Dublin next time by land.

No change at the Rectory; dear old Nat and Lettie the same

as ever ; but—though it seems so long—I have only been away seven weeks, after all. But changes elsewhere.

Nat told me all as we sat over the cheerful little fire together. Oh ! Errol, for the old time to have been unbroken now !

“My dear, I knew that this would happen,” said Nat, looking into the fire, as he always does when there is one to look into. “I knew that she was false from the first, false and heartless ; and I am sure he, too, had begun to know it before he went to London, for he had grown very silent and sad ; but she was engaged to him, and was very great here, especially at the Towers, and there was no apparent difference till he went. I never shall forget the change in him when he came home ; he was not sad then, so much as proud and stern, altogether unlike his old self. He spoke to her at once, and went away again—thoughtfully, I believe, for her sake ; but Mrs. Mark left here directly, at her daughter’s bidding. They are in London now, as I hear.”

“Tell me exactly what he heard there, Nat.”

“It seems that by chance he made the acquaintance of the very gentleman whom Miss Mark had promised to marry as soon as he had received the promotion he was then daily expecting, and who held himself engaged to her.”

“Did Mr. Cumberland tell him ?”

“No. He came home and told her, as I said ; and if she was not ashamed then, I wonder what would shame her.”

“I always knew,” said Lettie, “that it was the wealth she cared for.”

“But we don’t know, Lettie ; she may have loved *him* really, though she could not have loved the other gentleman.”

“To whom, nevertheless, she had betrothed herself.”

“Where is he, Nat ?”

“At home now, darling, with his father.”

“Is old Mr. Cumberland very ill ?”

“Very. Errol nurses him tenderly as a woman could.”

“And how—how does he look himself, Nat ?”

“Very unhappy, very much older. You must expect to see a great change in him.”

I have been looking closely, and I see the change too in myself. Very unhappy, very old ! Oh ! is there any comfort for him in the time to come ?

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Saturday, November 3rd.—This has been a day of great anxiety to us all. Nat was at the Towers until the evening, when he came home, telling us Mr. Cumberland was a little better, and Errol less hopeless about him ; though I did not think, from the way he told us, that he himself was less so at all.

He was resting in his low chair at the fire, looking into it, as usual, with a very thoughtful face, I was playing softly one of Handel's glorious melodies, Lettie working and Ben studying, both in the firelight, when the door opened, and my heart beat as I heard the familiar footstep. I turned, with my hand held out. We had not met since the day I threw away the pledge of his broken troth, and it was almost hard to recognise the worn face. He bowed, without touching my proffered hand, and spoke to Nat, pushing the hair from his face, almost as if bewildered.

Comfort ye, comfort ye. The beautiful air rang in my head, throwing a wild, sorrowful cadence over his low words.

"Will you come once more, Nat?—he is asking for you. I could not send to summon you after your long, patient help; but I thought, if I came for you, you would add this to all you have done."

Nat rose instantly.

"I will hasten on; you are tired, and can come slowly."

Lettie followed to give him a comforter, and I stood opposite to Errol, and spoke as naturally as I could.

"Will you accept my sympathy in your sorrow?"

I remember that, as I spoke, all the unquiet past seemed to be gone, and a strange, peaceful future to gather round us. Could it be death? Oh! no, not that!

Raising his eyes one moment—so doubly dark they looked in his pallid face—he gave me a simple word of thanks, and turned away. Oh! Errol, not even now!

Nat has just come home, and I went down to him. Mr. Cumberland is dead. He died with his hand in Errol's; and Errol is a lonely, rich man; proud as he never was before—ill and lonely. Oh! all too late! *Comfort ye, comfort ye.* How the words haunt me in all their wondrous pitifulness!

Monday, December 31st.—Shall I write it? Why not? What eyes besides my own will ever look upon it? I could not write at all through Errol's illness, though I often used to try, that it might take my thoughts from their anxious yearning for him whom I had no right to yearn for more than others, whom I longed so bitterly to see, but who was so far away from me, while I looked out in my loneliness upon his home.

He is much better now, and for the last few bright, mild days, he has been wheeled about in the gardens, Nat walking beside him always. Strange to say, Nat would tell me hardly anything of his illness, knowing, I suppose, how painful it is to hear of that kind of illness, with so much delirium. But no words he could have told me would have made that weary, dreadful time more weary or more hard to bear. But it is over now; and I trust I did not make Nat or Lettie more unhappy.

Nat asked me, once or twice, to go with him, and wait in different parts of the park until he joined me, and he would tell me of Errol as we walked home. To-day he said Errol was going to walk with him, and he left me on a quaint old seat, under the trees which stood bare against the blue Winter sky. To that very spot Errol had brought Nat, and Lettie, and me, the first day we visited Ashley Towers; and then we stood and watched the sea dancing in the sunlight, the branches arched above us, rich and heavy with their Summer foliage. Now the waves broke quietly and coldly on the beach, and the boughs were bare and gloomy above me as I sat alone. I remembered the beauty of everything on that day. It was only five years ago, and I had been but a child, as I stood beside them silently, feeling the peacefulness of the Summer afternoon in that still, shady spot; but it was nearer to my thoughts, nearer in my memory, than that day, only three months ago, when I had turned from him so passionately, and thrown away his ring. Then I waited, thinking—thinking, no need to tell with how much pain—of the time since then.

Nat had not been long away when I heard his step returning, but I did not turn until it came quite close. The tall figure bowed with weakness, and the white and weary-looking face, were not Nat's, and I started and turned pale.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Blackwood. Your brother said he would follow, if I would walk this way. I would not have disturbed you if I had known. I beg your pardon."

Not even yet! My heart stood so still, I could not answer: could only look wonderingly into the changed face.

"Please to tell him I have passed on."

Pass on so! My cry rang through the trees. "Errol, Errol, I cannot bear it!"

Motionless before me, looking now intently in my face, he waited.

"Oh, Errol, if I *may* comfort you, I will—indeed I will."

A quick, sudden drawing of his breath, and one step towards me; that was all—no softening of the stern, white face.

"Errol, may I tell you something of the love of my life?"

"Yes, do, that it may break my heart at once; 'twill be a fitting end."

"Long ago I gave my love to some one, so entirely, so unchangeably, that now, because he has taken his from me, my heart is breaking."

He raised his hand as if to put me away from him, and spoke through his closed teeth. "This is pity for me—only pity."

"Not pity, Errol, for when I offer you the love you used to prize, I will not be content without the love *I* used to prize."

A sudden and wonderful change had come into his face, and

after a moment's pause he drew me to him with a passionate tenderness.

"My love, my love! in my weakness and misery you have brought me strength and happiness. I fell so low—my pure little love, can you forgive it?"

"I feel, Errol, as if it had never been."

"My brave, true-hearted little girl! I never dared have spoken. I never dared have told you that my love for you was killing me; that it rose in all its strength to torture me, from the moment that you spurned it. Oh, how I wronged you, Madeleine! but I have suffered more than you can ever know."

The agony of his love and penitence made me frightened for him while he was so weak. "Errol, will you go and rest?" But he spoke on quietly, looking down into my eyes.

"The beautiful, truthful eyes of old. If they had not come back to me, I must have hidden myself from them for ever. Mayda, this was where I first looked into them and saw their loveliness. It was a childish, merry face then, with all its dreamy look upon the sea, and there is a childish look upon it still. Five years ago, and the little face, with its wondering, admiring eyes, has haunted this spot ever since. I often thought I was here in my illness; Nat knew, and said I must walk here first. But could I ever dream that *this* should be a reality? I, so unworthy. My darling, how shall I thank God for this?" He stood a little while, silent and bare-headed, and because I thought I knew why it was, I thanked Him too. Then Errol bent down once more. "How shall I know all this is not a dream, Mayda, unless you will take it?"

He drew something from his breast and looked into my face, My own ring—the ring I so contemptuously had thrown away

"When did you find it—how?"

"That very night. I spent hours in the search."

I gave him my hand and he put the ring on once more; then we went to meet Nat. He knew everything as soon as he saw us together, but Errol never thought of that.

"Nat," he said, "good brother, even in my sin and misery, will will you give her to me once again, to love and guard, and cherish through our lives."

"With all my heart, dear fellow—if she likes."

"I like, Nat."

Then we went on to the house, and Errol was so unwilling for us to leave him, that Nat promised to fetch him to the Rectory tomorrow morning, but he added quietly that I might take the pony and drive him. He told Lettie that Errol looked actually strong in his happiness, and Lettie was so happy to hear of it all.

Ben stopped me on the stairs to-night; sleepy as he must have been.

"I waited to see you alone, Miss May. I thought this was coming, and though I don't know what we shall do without you here, of course I am very glad. I shall come to the Towers very often, if I may."

"I hope so, indeed; and will you write me any more poetry, Ben?"

"Yes, if you'll promise not to show it to him."

Which of course I did not do.



There were no marks beyond that day, and I raised my eyes, only half conscious of where I was. Then I laid my two hands lovingly upon the book, and looked into the darkening room.

"Papa, I know that pretty spot above the sea; no wonder that you love it so."

"No wonder, dear, indeed."

He had risen and was standing beside me in the window, his gentle touch upon my head.

"You are just the age now that she was when—at that time you have read of. I wished you to know that story of your mother's life, though she would never have shown it. You shall read the rest when you can understand it better."

"How, papa?"

He smiled, and following his eyes, I saw that Ben Carson—Uncle Nat's old pupil; his firm and constant friend and his fellow-helper in all good works—was coming towards us in the dim light.

"Will he help me to understand?" I whispered.

"Yes, in the time to come."

"And this is little Ben?" I said, criticising him much, I am sure, to his surprise. "He must be wonderfully changed."

"So he is," my father said, looking kindly into the noble, honest face, "and yet—the Ben of old exactly."

Then Ben answered, tossing back his tawny hair as he did whenever he meant anything very earnestly. "Changed for any good by the unconscious teaching and the bright example of one you are so like, Madeleine."

"Am I like her? am I really like her, Ben?"

"In many things, but—not so beautiful."

And I was glad each time he said it, and I think I had asked him very many times. I could not picture the mother whose memory was so sacred to me with the face I looked at every day. It was sweet to be like her, but I felt the great difference; and I loved Ben all the better when he told me of it in his open, fearless way, quaintly reminding me of the boyish admiration I had just read of; though perhaps I need not have loved him better than I did that afternoon, when we three stood in the darkening twilight, thinking of the past.

"Papa," I cried, clinging to him, the present all dreamy to me, while my thoughts were in my mother's book, "of course I can never be to you what *she* was, but I will try to grow like her; and this is to be Ben's home, you said, so we shall be together."

Then I hid my face upon his shoulder, for I could not stop the tears.

"Hush, dear, no tears for her. There is no doubt or sorrow for her now."

WELL DONE!

"It is an old, old story,
Yet bideth ever new;
And he to whom it chanceth,
It breaks his heart in two."

HEINE.

JUST where one of our beautiful western rivers widens to the sea, nestles the little fisher-hamlet of Ferrybank; its low, thatched cottages clustered on the rugged beach, and dotted here and there on the noble cliffs which rise behind—brilliant in Summer-time with furze and broom and heather. On the other side of the river, the quiet and picturesque watering-place of Llanvriar lies cool and white among the rich, warm blossoms on the hillside; and between the hamlet and the town plies the little ferry-boat which gives the village its name. But the trusty little sailing-vessel is but rarely used; for at least half its time it leans in utter idleness under the ferryman's cottage, while the waters lap it softly as they pass.

But the fishing boats at Ferrybank have no such holiday. When *they* rest, they do it in an uncertain manner, standing ready for action though they are high and dry upon the rocky beach, and fully expecting to be dragged down amid those busy shouts, as they are dragged so many times in every year. But one there is, even of these, which from month to month, lies useless and rudderless upon an isolated shelf of rocks. And the fishermen—their rough voices softened a little—tell how, one evening, the Squire's yacht found that boat tossing tenantless upon the waves, not quite three miles from shore, and towed it slowly home; landing it on the beach, just where the missing fisherman's son stood waiting and watching for his father's signal. None of them can tell how Owen Vaughan—the ablest and most fearless sailor on the coast—met his death upon the secret sea; but they will tell how his boy, through all the night that followed sat alone upon the cliffs, and how, when he came home at last, he had a look upon his face as if he had borne the sorrow of a man's life, a look which they tell you he can never lose again.

And then they add—turning a little from your face, to look beyond the very sea itself, to where the sky spreads wide and bright above—that though such things may be like oft-told tales in lives like theirs, yet that the shock they bring never is the less keen for that, nor the bereavement the less deep and sore. This is how, in Owen Vaughan's cottage, there fell the great hush of a sudden grief, with which the boy—who had loved his father with that strength and tenderness of devotion which it is given us sometimes to see in boy-natures—battled, in a strange unboyish silence, while his mother let her sorrow overwhelm her, and the baby-girl—herself an unconscious comforter—eried wonderingly in the gloom of the darkened cottage.

But this grief grew less as years went on. The mother earned a scanty livelihood by her washing, and little Dyddgha—in spite of the weight of her Welsh name—grew from babyhood to girlhood, tall and lithe and active, ever ready with her nimble feet or fingers to lighten her mother's toil; while Owen won his way so rapidly in the village school, that the lame schoolmaster began most painfully to feel the narrowness of his own erudition under the boy's wide questioning. He was even right, too, when he muttered suggestively among the villagers that "Owen was an odd child, and would not associate with his schoolfellows." Owen *was* an odd child. Since he had lost that one friend who had shared every thought, he had let the reserve and solitariness which characterised him, grow and deepen. And little sympathy had the restless village lads with Owen's deep and concentrated love for the studies which to them meant only imprisonment. Nothing could they understand of the still bright dreams in which he sat alone by the whispering sea, or of the brave and fearless resolutions which he gathered strength to keep when he stood and watched the storm-beaten waters—finding perhaps an echo in his own longing heart to the wild mystic voice which was to make all doubt and wonder clear to him one day.

At last the village schoolmaster, seeing he could take the boy no farther on the path he trod so rapidly; mentioned generally the advisability of his leaving school now, and mentioned it particularly to Sir Bulkley Gwynne, the rich, eccentric bachelor who owned all Ferrybank, and lived in the great house upon the wooded bank above Llanvriar. Sir Bulkley, always quick to see the help which it was wise to give, and always proud and glad when he found unexpected gifts and powers among his people, examined the boy himself; startled without puzzling him, frightened without bewildering him; and then dismissed him with a few curt words of advice, but no encouragement. Yet only a few days afterwards the baronet appeared again in the village school, and, walking through the rows of standing boys, to where Owen waited with his head raised from his open book, he told him he

had chosen another school for him, and that the master had promised, on condition of the boy's progress being satisfactory—here the Squire's hand, which was upon Owen's shoulder now, grew a little heavier, and his voice a little more emphatic—to retain him as tutor, and pay him according to his services.

Sir Bulkley, making nothing of his own share in this, and saying nothing of the great hope he entertained for the lad, felt that he had given him just the start in life which, by his own industry and talent, might lead him safely to the end; but he never guessed the depth of his protégé's gratitude when Owen found that this school to which he was sent was one of the first private schools in Wales; nor with what intense earnestness the lad pursued this new path which his generous patron had opened for him, and in which it was such happiness to walk.

One day a new light broke upon his path for Owen, showing him the track for which he had been unconsciously longing. A friend of Sir Bulkley Gwynne's, who was going abroad and wanted a secretary and interpreter, heard of Owen's wonderful facility in acquiring languages, and offered to take him. The baronet, always ready and kind, travelled himself to the inland Welsh town, and started Owen off to London, handing him a note for £100, with a few kind words of encouragement which Owen never forgot through all his life, and telling him that when his engagement was over, if he would like to stay abroad and study, this would give him the power to do so.

To a fisherman's widow who has never been twenty miles from her cottage on the beach, who knows nothing of the world but its vague immensity, and nothing of the sea beyond the shore but its deep treachery, a journey to the Continent was terrible as exile. And so Owen—fearing anxious days and sleepless nights for his mother while she could fancy him upon his journey—would not tell her of his projected departure. But what a proud and bright astonishment there was in the cottage on the beach when Owen's first letter came from Paris! The mother's eyes had for years been weak and easily tired, but they never tired of reading those loving words, nor did her lips ever tire of kissing them. With the letter there came a portrait, always to be tenderly kept in the Bible which had been the father's, and which was opened at that page almost every hour of the day. The mother looked upon it only as the pictured face of her handsome loving boy; Sir Bulkley, studying it quietly, read something more than that.

Through France and Germany and Italy went Owen with his patron, perfecting himself in the language of each country, with that extraordinary power which seemed born with him; and his patron, returning to England, left him at a German University. Three years after that first letter from abroad had filled the

fishing village with a great astonishment, it was to receive a greater one. A handsome, grave-looking gentleman, with kindly gentle words for all he met, walked from the station to Mrs. Vaughan's cottage, and there put his arms about the slight figure of the little washerwoman and held her to his heart, while she sobbed out aloud, in the strength and weakness of her joy. Dyddgha, standing by in shy bewilderment, a grave and gentle girl of seventeen, felt the wonderful charm of his face when he turned to take her too within his arm; and, in a cry of gladness, there broke from her the old pet name for him, which had not passed her lips since she was a child, and he had been used to carry her out upon the cliffs, and tell her wonderful and beautiful legends of the sea.

Next morning Owen walked up to the great house on the bank, to see, to repay, and once again to thank Sir Bulkley, who, with a genial handshake, eyed him curiously, and asked where was the £100.

"Here, sir," said Owen, touching his temples lightly. "You bade me store it here."

And Sir Bulkley, laughing heartily at the thought of receiving the money, felt that the debt had been discharged in the way he best liked.

Now fell the second cloud on Owen's life; a cloud whose lengthening shadow was to reach the end. Before he left Germany he had obtained the appointment of second master at the grammar-school in Vicester, one of the first, if not the very first, in England. And it was whispered that to win this appointment was almost equal to winning the head-mastership, because Dr. Hope was very anxious to resign, and his second master, who would necessarily perform many of his duties temporarily, would stand the best chance of succeeding him. Proudly Owen told his mother and sister this, as he pictured glowingly the pleasant, restful life they should lead with him. Then fell the cloud, darkening at once his loving anticipations. The mother would not leave her cottage on the beach.

"I'm too old a tree to bear such moving, Owen, dear lad," she said. "It would kill me to be set in a new home now; I'd rather tarry where your father lived; no other place would ever be the same to me."

"Not the home which I would make you, mother; where you shall do what you like all day; only being there to make it home for me?"

But this pleading was of no avail, though he never wearied in it.

"You shall not work then, mother," he said at last, feeling that he must be content with that.

"Not work?" she echoed, as if the prospect were most dreary.

"Why, Owen, I should soon be tired of my life—a fretting, idle old woman. No, dear; let your mother live and work just as she has been used to; *that's* the kindest for her; and Dyddgha chooses to bide with me."

So Owen, all his loving dreams faded now, took possession of his solitary rooms, and the pleasure which he might have had in sending his frequent gifts to his mother was destroyed by her oft-expressed wish to have nothing more than she had been used to through her lowly life; nothing more, except her boy's cherished letters, and her proud knowledge of his goodness.

He lived at first a busy but almost saddened life at Vicester, too deeply studious to make many friends; but at last he found in Dr. Hope's household a sweeter companionship than he had ever dreamed of. A pleasant, genial household was that of the head-master, and here Owen was always made most welcome, liked and respected for himself alone. Dr. Hope, always cordial, was doubly so to Owen, on whose young strength and power he had learned to lean in many ways. Mrs. Hope, doubting nothing of the young man's antecedents, because he had been recommended by those who stood high in the world's ladder, encouraged his visits, and made them pleasant to him, with that subtle, delicate tact which some ladies possess so pre-eminently; and Alice, their only child, greeted him always with her gladdest smile, flushing brightly when she heard his step upon the pavement of the court, as she daily watched for his coming.

But no one saw his eyes gladden in her presence; no one saw his hand tremble when it met hers; for Owen—always remembering the cottage on the beach where his childhood had been spent, and where his mother and sister toiled—kept a close, firm grasp upon the burning hope which sometimes rose within him stronger than his strength, and placed between himself and Alice the shadow of his earliest poverty; so much the darker from her own frankly-avowed pride and pleasure in her old honourable name.

"It is always well for a man who would attain a good position in *my* line of life, to have on his side good birth and a good name, followed up of course by an English university education."

So the doctor would say sometimes, and Owen would laughingly argue in favour of the German education, and let the other criticism pass. But though he could so laugh it off at times, the strain was slowly telling upon him, and at his solitary fireside he would make a resolution—bravely enough he could make it there—not to go to the Schoolhouse save on rare and necessary occasions; and when the hope, of which he was scarcely conscious, was mastering him, he would travel to Ferrybank, and again plead with his mother, in the low, dark cottage

which grew to seem more and more gloomy to him on each visit. Still no pleading, even of his, availed.

"But, mother, if you will not come with me," supplicated Owen, "let me find you another home. It shall be in this very spot if you like; only let it be free from gloom and discomfort."

But the mother pleaded in her turn to be left where she was happiest; and, silenced once more, Owen sought to beautify the place a little by his generous gifts. But no; these made no difference to the poor dwelling. All the money that he sent his mother, was put sacredly away. "When I am gone, Dyddgha," she would say to her daughter, "you will find it all untouched, and you may want it then."

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It was Christmas-eve, and Owen was to dine at the School-house. He entered the long, warm room just as Alice, with her hands full of flowers, came in from the greenhouse. While they lingered together arranging the flowers, she wooed him on to talk of what she felt he loved, and knowing that home would be near his heart this Christmas time, asked him of his mother and his sister.

"I never like to mention your sister's name, Mr. Vaughan," she said, "because I do not know how to pronounce it. I have seen it in a book of yours, but I never heard you say it."

The colour mounted slowly to Owen's brow, for something in Alice's gentle words sounded like a rebuke.

"We pronounce it Duthga," he said; "it is an odd name, is it not? But it looks worse than it sounds."

"I like the sound of it," Alice answered. "I think I should know your sister if I saw her, Mr. Vaughan, though I do not fancy her like you; no girl could have your kind of face. Is she as tall as—I am?"

"No," answered Owen, smiling a little as he pictured the two girls—one in her plain calico gown, singing to herself as she stood ironing in the cottage kitchen; and the other as she stood beside him now, in her white dress, with the delicate fern and crimson rosebud in its bosom.

"Is she as fond of flowers as I am?" asked Alice, guessing nothing of these thoughts.

"I cannot tell," said Owen, watching her white fingers as they touched caressingly the brilliant petals, "for she has not such flowers as these within her reach."

"There are some beautiful ferns to be found at Tenby," said Alice, in quick fear lest she had hurt him. "Papa and I have found some choice ones near there. Does she know, I wonder; because—because your home is not far from Tenby, you once told me."

The girl's voice grew unconsciously a little wistful as she spoke, for she remembered how seldom he had told her anything of his home, or of those whom he must love so dearly; but just then her father called Owen into his study, and she was left to wonder. She had a misty impression, though she could not tell how gathered, that his mother did not like society, and that her daughter would not leave her; but she knew that Owen had never definitely told her even this.

"Does he think I would not care to hear, or does he not care for me enough, to speak to me of those he loves? I think they must be very, very good," she sighed, letting the flowers drop from her listless hands, "and I seem shallow and flippant to him, and I vex him almost every time we talk together. Even those few words I said about the flowers, pained him somehow. I wish I knew how; I wish—I suppose women can never be deep and true, just quite like men. I wish I didn't care. I wish I hadn't said it."

And suddenly and pettishly, she swept the flowers away, as if the sight and scent were painful to her.

But Alice had forgotten this passing cloud, before the long and cheerful dinner was over. The servants had left the room, when Owen, sitting next to Alice and listening happily to her bright voice, felt a sudden chill creep in upon the scene. The words of one of the doctor's guests struck upon his quick, keen ear.

"Much as I want a tutor in my school before next term, I could not engage him, because he cannot have been brought up as a gentleman. His father, I hear, was a village tradesman. But what looks particularly bad is, that he does not tell the fact himself. In many ways he would undoubtedly suit the post, for he is gentlemanly-looking, and he speaks well, besides having testimonials of the highest class. Still, there is that insuperable objection."

"Insuperable," muttered the doctor, assentingly. "I would not entertain the idea. What do you think, Vaughan?"

"If," said Owen, taking a long time to peel an atom of walnut, and looking down upon it very intently, "if his words and acts, as well as his appearance, are those of a gentleman, I cannot see what difference is left for his birth to make. One can but look and act and speak as a gentleman, let one's birth be the noblest in the land; and if we miss none of these things in each other, what need have we to question farther?"

"You speak warmly, Mr. Vaughan. In my place, you evidently would engage this son of a village shopkeeper, to educate the sons of noblemen and gentlemen."

"We men do not often question each other on our birth and early life," said Owen, "and do not often volunteer to talk of it

unquestioned. Then will it never be, that we may judge men by what we find them, and respect or despise them, not according to the rank they bear, but according to the part they act?"

"Better in theory than in practice, Vaughan," said Dr. Hope, lightly. "Still, my chief objection would be the want of truthfulness at starting."

"Many of our highest families," said Alice, "have been founded by one man who has risen from the people, and they are proud to trace back to such an one. Why, because we are his contemporaries, should we scorn him for it?"

"Suppose," said Owen, glancing rapidly into Alice's face, while his heart beat gratefully for her words, "suppose, Dr. Hope, that one of your own masters had come to live among you, of lower birth even than this candidate you speak of, and had told you nothing of his antecedents, feeling that, if he were suitable for the post, that was all, and that, if he were not, you would soon discover it; suppose you had liked him, and associated freely with him, giving him a welcome always in your house, and had then discovered his history—should you blame him for his silence?"

"Blame him!" echoed the doctor, hotly. "I should turn my back upon him promptly, I assure you, were he the finest scholar in England."

Slowly and darkly the colour rose in Owen's face. "That is the general opinion, I suppose," he said; and Alice was not the only one who noticed the tone of pain in his voice.

"What should you do yourself, Mr. Vaughan?" asked Mrs. Hope, merrily. "Come, next to the doctor himself, you are the one most likely to be placed in such a position."

"I think," said Owen quietly, "that I should merely care what the man himself might be. It would signify as little to me what his father had been as what his son was to be in years to come."

"Wait until some one imposes upon you," returned the doctor. "He would not like it, would he, Alice?" he added, laughing up at her, as she rose to follow her mother.

Eagerly Owen waited for her answer.

"I do not think a really low-born man could succeed in such an imposture, papa," she carelessly said, "even if he tried."

The Christmas mirth had all died out of Owen's eyes when he joined Alice again, and her shy, kind words could not bring it back; neither did their memory bring a tender smile to his lips when he recalled them afterwards.

"I will not go again. I will live my life apart from theirs," he said, as he walked wearily through the silent streets to meet the midnight train. "A friendship with deceit for its foundation cannot last. It is better it should grow no deeper than it is—Heaven knows it clings too closely about my heart to-night."

in love and quietness that Christmas Day was spent by Owen in his mother's cottage on the shore, but never had the want of comfort in his old home struck him with such a weight of suffering. "Yet," he said, "it would have been better to have known no life but this, rather than be living two so far apart."

Once more he urged his old entreaty—once more, and never so ardently as now—but still she gave the one answer which he could not neglect. No, she was happier so. And, with a kiss, she bade him leave her there, because it was better for her.

"But, mother, take my gifts," he cried, the words wrung from him in his deep heart-loneliness, and in his longing for the consciousness that his life-work was not utterly useless and of benefit to no one. "Take my gifts, mother, and let me feel that I am not working and living in vain."

"Dear, there are plenty of other uses for your money," she answered, her voice a little broken now, to see his bitter earnestness.

"But none so sweet to me, none so pleasant to me," he said, in eager dissent.

"There soon will be, dear lad," she whispered, "even if it is not so already."

Then the mother, all unlearned though she was, could read the face she loved; and seeing there a trouble which she vaguely understood, she took the tired head within her arms, and wept and whispered over it, as if those far-back days had come again when the mother's arms were all the heaven he knew. That was the last time Owen urged his old request, and that was the last time the grave eyes found that sweet relief of tears upon a mother's breast.



Well and bravely Owen had kept his resolution; while Alice, from the sombre rooms of the old Schoolhouse, listened in vain for the familiar step upon the pavement, waited in vain for the old clasp of the slight firm fingers, and hungered in vain for the old pleasure his coming ever gave. And he? He performed his old tasks just as he had performed them always.

As the Spring came on, she drooped and pined so sadly that they said she needed the sea air, and they begged her to accept the invitation of an old school-friend, who had lately married, and gone from her home in Scotland, to stay with her husband's relations on the Welsh coast.

"It is to Llanvriar I am going, Mr. Vaughan," said Alice, a little wearily, as she told Owen of her approaching departure, while he stood steadily before her, looking into her pale face. "Papa says he thinks I shall be close to your home. May I take anything for you? Is there *anything* I can do?"

No, there was nothing he told her, speaking with cold tight lips, while his heart grew hot and wild with rebellion as he thought how, if his home had been different, Alice would have brightened it now, for his sake. And so they parted, with a simple hand-shake.

While Alice was at Llanvriar, there was a concert given by the patrons of the Ferrybank school. One of the singers, a pretty, grave-looking girl of about twenty, struck Alice particularly.

"It almost seems to me as if I had seen her before," she said to Mr. Gwynne, her host; "and yet I know I have not. I have not even seen any one very like her, and yet something—in her eyes, I think—seems familiar to me. Who is she?"

"She is supposed to be rather a peculiar girl," was the answer; "yet no one knows why, unless to be good and helpful to one's mother is peculiar; perhaps they think so in Ferrybank, for it isn't a very common failing there. She has a brother, though, who is peculiar, really—a specimen of that rare wild-plant, Genius; a specimen no one would expect to find drifted into a wretched fisher-cabin on our shore. He was one of my uncle's *protégés*. I wish Sir Bulkley were at home now, that you might ask about him, because my uncle is so proud to rehearse his career. I believe he is doing excellently now in England, and I suppose he deserves it, for he studied like any old don you like to mention, Miss Hope."

"Did he?" asked Alice, but little interested. "Please tell me what is this girl's name."

"Dyddgha Vaughan. Her mother is a washerwoman, and lives in one of those desolate cabins on the shore, in the very midst of the fish odours; a lasting disgrace, I think—though I dare not say so to Sir Bulkley—to the son, who lives in abundance himself, and leaves his mother and sister to earn their own livelihood in such a hole. You can see the cottage from our windows. I will show it you; such a poor place it is."

"What?"

The word came from Alice in a whisper; and, fancying she was anxious to hear, Mr. Gwynne told her *his* version of Owen's story; while the words crept into her icy heart, and the music to which she had come to listen died unheard.

That Owen should have been her truest friend for all two years—her nearest and first friend, she repeated to herself, the flush of anger and mortification rushing into her face at the thought—only to give her this pain at last!

Day after day, at that window of the house which overlooked the fishing hamlet, and from which Alice could see the thatched cottage standing alone upon the beach, the girl would sit, in a

listless, dreamy pain. Could it be true? Could it all be true? Could *that* be Owen's home?

Then she would drop her work or book, and rise and gaze upon the cottage, in a wondering, anxious doubt—which yet could not prevent the longing tenderness shining in her eyes, so proud and yet so true. Could *that* be Owen's home? Could Owen's mother labour there, while he was living in ease and luxury far away? Could it be true? So the thoughts hotly ran, while yet—though Alice did not know it—the very truth of her fear was to be read in her eyes, while she gazed and gazed down upon Owen's home.

“I think I will go just once and see his mother,” she said to herself, over and over again, during her stay at Llanvriar; but a strange new feeling of shame, which she blushed to recognise, prevented her.

Alice had been at home a week or even more, before Owen Vaughan came voluntarily once more to the Schoolhouse. Dr. and Mrs. Hope were both out, and Alice sat alone. The familiar step, for which she had so often listened, was close behind her now, yet she never turned. How could she turn, while *that* light—half of anger, but half of passionate affection—burned in her eyes? He sat beside her, grave and gentle as of old, but there was a new tone in his voice now, for he had come to tell her the story of his life; and there was a new longing in his face while he told her how he loved her. In a few simple words he told her, but these words she saw were uttered from his heart, and their truth and earnestness were like the truth and earnestness of prayer.

“I have determined many times that I would never utter these words to you, Alice,” he said. “I have struggled long and hard against temptation, but it has mastered me at last. Before you went away, looking so frail, I almost broke my resolution. But when you came back, still looking weak and ill, and when I found you cold and strange to me, I said, ‘I will listen to nothing now but my own heart. I will tell her the story of my early life, and then how fervently I have loved her, and *must* love her always. I will tell her everything, and leave my fate in her hands.’ Alice, I read my answer in your face; I see that you disdain this love of mine, and send me from you. Ah! how hard it will be to trust or hope in any one again. Wait; do not say it yet. I thought I had prepared myself, but the darkness falls so suddenly.”

But Alice did say it. She told him she disdained the love he offered; and told him so in cold and scornful words, which were to come back to her afterwards, with the crushing weight with which they fell upon *his* heart. And he watched the young, fresh lips from which the cruel words were

falling, as if he were struggling to awake from some desolate dream.

"You tell me this story of your childhood, Mr. Vaughan," she ended, with chilling slowness, "because you rightly guess that I heard it before I returned. It is as unnecessary to tell it to me at all now, as it is unnecessary to tell me of the imagined love which was built upon deceit."

The shadows, darkening his eyes as he turned them slowly from hers, frightened her; and she dared not glance again at him as he sat in that deathly silence, his chest heaving with violent emotion.

"If you were capable of such love as you speak of," she went on, with cutting emphasis, in his long silence, "would your own mother and sister be toiling in poverty, while you are living among us as a *gentleman*?"

"Hush!" he said, slowly, as he rose, with a suppressed passion in his steadfast eyes. "You have said enough to kill my hope; more than you will care to recall in the years to come. Only in rare sweet moments have I ever dreamed that you would accept my love when you knew all; but I *never* dreamed that from your lips could come such words of cruel contempt. I will say nothing of their truth or falsehood—it is enough for me that you can believe them."

The Spring sunshine still streamed through the old window, but it touched the white, brave face no longer. The slow step died below upon the pavement, and as each echo fell heavily on Alice's heart, she longed to cry aloud.

"If I had been prepared," she sighed, wearily, "or if I had really been what he has thought me, I should have—have said it differently."

"I think, mother," she whispered that evening, when her mother wondered at her wan face, "it would do me good to go back to Llanvriar for a little time. I promised to do so if I could. Will you let me go at once?"

So the next morning Alice went.



A little of the old colour had come back to Alice's cheek, and a little of the old lightness to her step, before she had been many days at Llanvriar. But she knew it was not the sea-air which had brought them back. Sir Bulkley Gwynne was at home now, and on the very first evening of her arrival she had heard Owen's story from him. Thinking over this story as the generous old Squire had told it, Alice knew that a great change had come over all her thoughts of Owen.

"When I go home again," she mused, in silent happiness,

"I shall see him and speak to him once more. And then perhaps——"

The words died here ; but it was plain that Alice, though she had longed to come, was looking forward already to this going home. And more than ever now she stood beside the window overlooking Ferrybank, and gazed with anxious, loving eyes on Owen's home.

"It strikes me, Miss Hope," remarked Mr. Gwynne, coming up to her at this window one day, "that you are not to leave Llanvriar without seeing a storm at sea. You say you have never seen one in your life."

"Never," answered Alice, shuddering unconsciously.

"Well, I think my uncle's prognostic of this evening is likely to be verified—he always dreads this south-west wind. I am going across to Ferrybank to see how things are looking, for the gale increases fast, and threatens to be violent."

"Is there a lifeboat on the coast?" asked Alice, late that night, when she and Mrs. Gwynne sat listening to the wind, as it rumbled through the trees, and moaned of its own dark deeds upon the sea.

"Yes ; it was one of Sir Bulkley's generous gifts to Ferrybank, and many a life has been saved already. We have one of the ablest crews in Britain—so we always say—ready to go out at a minute's notice. Don't look so frightened, dear. Shall we go to bed?"

"Oh, no! Please let us wait for Mr. Gwynne. It is too terrible a night for sleep or rest."

So they waited in the cheerful light and warmth, very silent and subdued ; and sitting close together, except when Alice, in her great fear, rose and opened the shutters, to look out, through the splashed panes, into the blackness of the tempestuous night. A night, indeed, it was, "on which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost." As she stood so, there flashed before her a sudden rapid light, darting upward for an instant, and then gone. Alice knew it came from a vessel in distress, and with a cry of fear she threw open the window, bending her head against the wind, while the foam rushed up into her eyes. The solemn roar of the waters on the beach was heard beyond the thunder and the wind and rain ; and the lightning, flashing swiftly over the angry sea, showed her for one moment the high and heavy line of surf. With a prayer upon her lips for those tossed helplessly upon the sea to-night, she closed the window and the shutters. Then the two friends sat quite still together, waiting and longing for the morning.

Down upon the shore at Ferrybank, a breathless, eager crowd had gathered ; leaning hard against the wind, and blinded by the spray which dashed in showers to the wild shore. Gazing,

gazing, out into the darkness which hid the hungry sea, they waited while the wide doors of the lifeboat-house were unlocked, and the great boat wheeled down to brave the storm. Amid all the mightier sounds, Sir Bulkley Gwynne's voice rose clear and sharp, as, watching the trained crew take down their lifebelts, he counted them rapidly.

"One is missing—Hughes. Where is Hughes?"

No one had seen Hughes, but half a hundred voices called his name now.

"His place must be supplied," the Squire shouted, sharply and distinctly. "We dare not delay one second."

A young man, who had been active and prompt in his help, came into the light of the lamp which Sir Bulkley held.

"I am ready, Sir Bulkley; let me go. You know that an oar is no new toy to me. If you refuse me I shall take out my father's boat. Listen! Could I stay upon the shore here while the drowning plead for help? In the rocket's light I saw the lifeboat from the brig put out, and I know it could not pull through such a sea as this. Let me go, Sir Bulkley."

As he spoke, the Baronet, raising the lamp which he was placing in the boat, saw in his face the steady bravery which was so evident in his low, quick tones.

"Vaughan! I did not know you were here. I trust you in this, as I have trusted you before. Go, if you think it well."

"Thank God!" said Owen, softly, as the Squire wrung his hand.

Amid the cries and prayers of the excited crowd, the strong, swift boat put out upon the dangerous surf; and all eyes followed its light, as it rose and fell upon the waves, and slowly neared that other faint light which glowed on the masthead of the struggling vessel.

Only five miles from shore the brig must be, and now and then distinctly seen in the sudden blazing of the rockets; yet how the lights reeled and tossed, and *would not* meet!

"Sir Bulkley, I've been ill for weeks, sir,"—the one member of the crew, who had been absent when the lifeboat started, came panting breathlessly upon the scene,—“but I saw the rockets, and I couldn't lie upon my bed and leave my place here empty.”

"The boat is out on its duty, Hughes," the Baronet answered, a little sternness in his voice, though he marked pityingly the man's pained breathing. "Your place is filled by one who will do his duty, even to death."

"It shouldn't have been Owen Vaughan, though," said Hughes, when the bystanders had told him of the launch. "His arms haven't been in lately for that sort of work, and they say that, two or three years ago, he was forbidden to use an oar. What

could induce him to go when he knew that? Ah!—There, see how how she rides that heavy sea—God bless her!"

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The waves sobbed gently and softly, tired of the passionate unrest of their long night; and gazing upon them with wide and tearless eyes, as if their mellow plash bewildered her, Alice stood again at that window from which she could see Owen's cottage home.

It was quite late in the morning when Mr. Gwynne returned to tell of the scene upon the shore last night.

"After all, I'm thankful to tell you that only one accident occurred," he said, wondering at the depth and sadness of Alice's sympathy, "but it was a painful one indeed. That young Vaughan, of whom my uncle told you so much, Miss Hope, happened to be at his mother's cottage—came only yesterday, or the day before—and he volunteered to take one place in the life-boat—begged for it, indeed. Splendidly he handled his oar, so all the crew say, and was untiring in all he could do for the rescued. 'Strong and brave and ready,' they said; and if you knew them you would understand what *that* means. Whether only worked too hard, or whether he hurt himself in some way, is not known, but when he tried to land he fell upon the beach. I helped to carry the poor fellow into his mother's cottage, and I shall not soon forget her face, as it met his. The doctors talk of paralysis of the heart, and say he must have known that such a task as he undertook last night would probably kill him. He had been warned in Germany, it seems. I'm glad to say they have not told the mother this, for they had before told her how he entreated my uncle to send him; and how could she reconcile the two facts?"

Every word entered deeply into Alice's sore heart, and when all had been told, one thought and longing held her. Alone and unobserved she slipped away and hurried to the river. The old ferryman was busy enough this morning; his boat had been ceaselessly plying its way to and fro ever since daybreak. Eagerly Alice listened to the voices around her as she was pulled across, for all were talking of the storm, and all spoke Owen's name.

When she reached the opposite shore, she walked on rapidly, among the spars of the lost vessel and over the dismal line of drifted seaweed, to that cottage on the beach, in which she knew that Owen lay. For a moment she felt she must be mistaken, because no crowd had gathered here; but one glance around showed her a group of people whispering together at a short distance, and, unconsciously thanking them in her heart for the silent respect thus shown, she knocked softly at the half-closed door.

"I am an old friend of Mr. Vaughan's," said Alice, very softly, as she looked appealingly into the face of Owen's sister "May I see him?"

Dyddgha's eyes, swollen and tired with weeping, fixed themselves for a moment wonderingly upon the lady who said this; a lady with a beautiful pale face and eyes as tired as her own, quietly and simply dressed, yet elegant as few visitors at the gloomy cottage had ever looked to the girl before. Without answering, she let Alice into the kitchen, and then stood in hesitation beside the window, where a bunch of primroses and wild white violets drooped as if they felt the sorrow of the house.

"My brother is very, very ill," she whispered; every word uttered in keenest pain. "Do you think you had *better* see him?"

"Yes, O yes," pleaded Alice, her voice most earnest and entreating.

Without another word, Dyddgha led the way noiselessly to an inner room; and stood aside for Alice to pass in.

The end was very, very near. Alice saw that, even in her first yearning gaze.

"Owen"—she cried. But she could say no other word, and only fell upon her knees beside the bed, and looked at him, with all her heart surging in her eyes.

"Alice—once more together," he whispered; and the look upon his face was one of perfect peace, no agony and no regret. "Together at the end. The distance that lay between us, dear, is all travelled now."

Kneeling there, in the presence of the great Leveller, and looking back upon her life and his, Alice felt how slight *had been* this distance of which he spoke, yet how impossible to pass it now. The barrier which had stood between them when she felt herself above him had been raised by her own hand, she owned, with a sobbing pain at her heart. Now, with that wonderful glory on his face, he stood immeasurably above *her*; and this barrier was from the hand of God.

And still she could not speak to him one word; only her eyes—so full of love and pain and penitence—told all.

His two kind friends were with him at the end. Old Dr. Hope (who had only the day before received the short sad letter in which Owen told his story and resigned his appointment in the grammar-school) was in time to tell him, with dim eyes, how he had come himself on purpose to tempt him back to the place he had filled so well; and Sir Bulkley Gwynne was there too, walking quietly in the outer room, and muttering that the sunshine on the water dazzled him.

The eyes upon the pillow, bright with unutterable happiness,

read the yearning love upon those faces gathered in the silent room ; and read it in that highest light which made all clear.

Softly, through the open doorway, came the soothing murmur of the sea. Away, in the wide blue above the open windows, a lark's song faltered towards the unreach'd heaven. The only shadow on the bright Spring noon was the hushed shadow of the outspread wings.



BY THE NIGHT EXPRESS.

A BITTER December midnight, and the up-express panting through its ten minutes' rest at Rugby. What with passengers just arriving, and passengers just departing—what with the friends who came to see the last of the departing passengers, or to meet the arriving ones—the platform was full enough, I can assure you, and I had some difficulty in making my way from carriage to carriage, even though I generally find that people (almost unconsciously, perhaps) move aside for the guard when they see him walking up or down close to the carriage doors. This difficulty was increased, too, by the manoeuvres of my companion, a London detective, who had joined me to give himself a better opportunity of examining the passengers. Keenly he did it, too, in that seemingly careless way of his, and, while he appeared to be only an idle, lounging acquaintance of my own, I knew that under his unsuspected scrutiny it was next to impossible for the thieves he was seeking to escape—even in hampers. I didn't trouble myself to help him, for I knew it wasn't necessary ; yet I was as anxious as hundreds of others were that those practised thieves, whom the police had been hunting for the last two days, should be caught as they deserved.

Sometimes we came upon a group which my companion could not take in at a glance, and then he always found himself unusually cold, and stopped to stamp a little life into his petrified feet. Of course, for me, this enforced standing was the signal for an attack of that persistent questioning with which railway guards are familiar, and, in attending to polite questioners who deserved answering, and unpolite ones who insisted on it, I had not much time for looking about me ; but presently I did catch myself watching one girl who stood alone at some distance. A girl very pretty and pleasant to look upon, I thought, though her face, and her dress, and her attitude were all sad ; a tall, slight girl, in deep mourning, with a quantity of bright, fair hair platted high upon her head, as well as hanging loosely on her shoulders ; and a childishly innocent face, with pretty, bewildered eyes. She stood just at the door of the booking-office, and I wished I could

have gone straight to her, and put her into one—the most comfortable—of the line of carriages at which she gazed so timidly. Just as I hesitated, a very remarkable figure elbowed its way to me—a stout, grandly-dressed old lady, panting painfully, and almost piercing me with a pair of restless, half-opened eyes, that looked out through the gold-rimmed spectacles perched on her sharp nose. Two porters followed her, laden with bags, cloaks, umbrellas, and flowers—the only flowers in the station, I expect, on that Winter night—and one of the men winked at me over her head, while the other guarded her treasures, with a face of concentrated anxiety, and thoughts engrossed by possible fees.

“This is the London train, is it, gua’d?” she asked, peering sharply into my face with her half-closed eyes, as if she found it difficult to distinguish me even through her spectacles.

From her whole attitude I guessed her to be deaf, but I never guessed *how* deaf until, after yelling my answer so loud that the engine-driver must have heard it eighteen carriages off, she still remained stonily waiting for it.

“Deaf as a dozen posts,” remarked the detective, aloud, giving the old lady an expressive little nod in the direction of the train.

“Slow train?” she asked, in that plaintive tone which the very deaf often use.

“Mail!” I shouted, putting my mouth as close to her cheek as I fancied she would like.

“Ale!” she shrieked back at me, the spectacles shaking a little on her thin nose. “Why should you want ale for listening to civil questions that you are paid to answer? Ale indeed! I believe railway men think of nothing else.”

Then she shook her head angrily and waddled off, looking as acid an old party as one would ever care to see. In at every door she peered through the glittering glasses, the two porters following her, until she made a stop before an empty second-class carriage near my van, and, with much labour and assistance, got herself and her packages into it.

When I passed, a few minutes afterwards, she was standing in the doorway, effectually barring the door to any other passenger by her own unattractive appearance there, and prolonging with an evident relish the anxiety of the obsequious porters. I fancy that though the purse she fumbled in was large, the coin she wanted was but small, for I passed on and left her still searching, and still asking questions of the men, but hearing nothing either of their replies or of the loud asides in which they indulged to each other. I had reached the other end of the train, and was just about making my way back to my own van, when the young lady I had before noticed went slowly in front of me, towards the empty first-class compartment near which I stood.

"Am I right for Euston?" she asked me gently, as she hesitated at the door.

"All right, miss," I said, taking the door from her, and standing while she got in. "Any luggage?" For from that very moment I took her, in a sort of way, into my charge, because she was so thoroughly alone, you see, not having any friends there even to see her off.

"No luggage, thank you," she answered, putting her little leather satchel down beside her on the seat, and settling herself in the corner farthest from the open door. "Do we stop anywhere between here and London?"

"Don't stop again, miss, except for a few minutes to take tickets." Then I looked at her as much as to say, "You're all right, because I'm the guard," and shut the door.

I suppose that, without exactly being aware of it, I kept a sort of watch over this carriage, for I was perfectly aware of a lazy young gentleman who persistently kept hovering about it, and looking in. His inquisitive eyes had of course caught sight of the pretty face in there alone, and I could see that he was making up his mind to join her; but he seemed doing it in a most careless and languid manner. He was no gentleman for that reason. I said to myself; yet his dress was handsome, and the hand that played with his long, dark beard was small and fashionably gloved. Glancing still into the far corner of that one first-class compartment, he lingered until the last moment was come: then, quite leisurely, he walked up to the door, opened it, entered the carriage, and in an instant the door was banged to behind him. Without the least hesitation I went up to the window, and stood near it while the lamp was fitted in the compartment. The gentleman was standing up within, drawing on a dark overcoat; the young lady in the distant corner was looking from the window, as if even the half-darkness was better to look at than this companion. Mortified a good deal at the failure of my scheme for her comfort, I went on to my van, beside which the detective waited for me.

"No go, you see," he muttered, crossly; "and yet it seemed to me so likely that they'd take this train."

"I don't see why it *should* seem likely," I answered, for I hadn't gone with him in the idea. "It doesn't seem to me very likely that three such skilful thieves as you are dodging, who did their work in this neighbourhood so cleverly two nights ago, should leave the station *any* night, by the very train which the police watch with double suspicion."

"Doesn't it?" he echoed, with most satirical knowingness. "Perhaps you may have got it quite clear in your mind how they *will* leave the town; for it's sure enough that they haven't left it up to now. That they'll be in a hurry to leave it, is sure enough,

too, for this isn't the sort of place they'll care to hide in, longer than necessary. Well, what's the hardest place for us to track them in?—London. And what's the easiest place for them to get on sea from?—London. Then, naturally enough, to London they'll want to go. Isn't this a fast train, and shouldn't *you* choose a fast train if you were running away from the police?"

I didn't tell him what sort of a train I should choose, because I hadn't quite made up my mind; and he was looking cross enough for anything, in that last glimpse I caught of him.

Having nothing better to do, I wondered a good deal how these thieves could arrange their getting away, while the walls were covered with the description of them, and every official on the line was up in it. There was no doubt about their being three very dexterous knaves, but then our detective force was very dexterous too, though they weren't knaves (and I do believe the greater dexterity is generally on the knavish side); and so it was odd that the watching still was ineffective, and the offered reward unclaimed. I read over again the handbill in my van, which described the robbers. "Edward Capon, alias Captain Winter, alias John Pearson, alias Dr. Crow; a thick-set, active man, of middle height, and about fifty years of age; with thick iron-grey hair and whiskers, dark grey eyes, and an aquiline nose. Mary Capon, his wife; a tall woman of forty, with a handsome, fair face, a quantity of very red hair, and a cut across her under lip. Edward Capon, their son; a slightly-built youth of not more than fifteen or sixteen (though, for the matter of that, I thought he had evidently cunning enough for twice his age), with closely-cut black hair, light grey eyes, and delicate features."

We all knew this description well enough, and for two days had kept our eyes open, hoping to identify them among the passengers. But our scrutiny had all been in vain; and as the train rushed on, I felt how disappointed the police at Euston would be, when we arrived again without even tidings of them.

I was soon tired of this subject, and went back to worrying myself about the sad-looking, yellow-haired girl, who had so evidently wished to travel alone, and been so successfully foiled in the attempt, by that intrusive fop with the handsome beard. Foolishly I kept on thinking of her, until, as we were dashing almost like lightning through the wind and darkness, only fifteen or twenty miles from Chalk Farm, the bell in my van rang out with a sharp and sudden summons. I never wondered for a moment who had pulled the cord; instinctively I knew, and—it was the carriage farthest from my van! I left my place almost breathlessly, as the engine slackened speed, and, hastening along the footboard, hesitated at no window until I reached the one from which I felt quite sure that a frightened young face would be looking out. My heart literally beat in dread, as I stopped and

looked into the carriage. What did I see? Only the two passengers, buried in their separate corners. The young lady raised her head from the book she held, and looked up at me astonished—childishly and wonderingly astonished.

"Has anything happened to the train?" she asked, timidly.

The gentleman roused himself from a seemingly comfortable nap.

"What on earth has stopped us in this hole?" he said, rising, and pushing his handsome face, and his long beard, past me at the window.

It was only too evident that the alarm had not been given from this carriage, yet the feeling had been such a certainty to me, that it was long before I felt quite convinced to the contrary; and I went on along the footboard to other carriages, very much more slowly than I had gone first to that one. Utter darkness surrounded us outside, but from the lamplit compartments eager heads were thrust, searching for the reason of this unexpected stoppage. No one owned to having summoned me until I reached the second-class carriage near my own van (which I had hastened past before), where the fidgetty, deaf old lady, who had amused me at Rugby, sat alone. I had no need to look in and question her. Her head was quite out of the window, and though she had her back to the light and I couldn't see her face, her voice was cool enough to show that she was not overpowered by fear.

"What a time you've been coming!" she said. "Where is it?"

"Where's what?"

But though I yelled the question with all my might and main, I believe I might just as hopefully have questioned the telegraph post which I could dimly see beside us, and have expected an answer along the wires.

"Where's the small luncheon basket?" she inquired, pulling out her long purse with great fussiness. "A small luncheon basket, my good man, and make haste."

Shall I ever forget the sharp expectancy of the old lady's eyes as they looked into mine, first over, then under, then through, her gold-rimmed spectacles? What surprised me most particularly was the fact of her decidedly *not* being, as any one might suppose, a raving lunatic.

"Be quick with the small luncheon basket, please," she said, resignedly sitting down, and pouring the contents of her purse out into her lap; "I'm as hungry as I can be."

I suppose that, when she looked up at me from the silver she was counting, she saw my utter bewilderment (I didn't try now to make her hear, for I knew it to be hopeless), for she raised her voice suddenly to a shrill pitch of peevishness, and pointed with one shaking hand to the wall of the carriage.

"Look there ! Doesn't it say 'Small luncheon baskets. Pull down the cord' ? I want a small luncheon basket, so I pulled down the cord. Make haste and get it me, or I'll report you to the manager."

Seeing now that she was almost as blind as she was deaf, I began to understand what she meant. On the spot to which she pointed, above the seat opposite her, two papers were posted in a line ; one the advertisement of " Small luncheon baskets supplied at Rugby " the other the Company's directions for summoning the guard and stopping the train in cases of danger. As they happened to be placed, the large letters did read as she had said :

" SMALL LUNCHEON BASKETS

PULL DOWN THE CORD."

While I was gazing from her to the bills, getting over a bit of my astonishment, and she was giving me every now and then a sharp touch on the shoulder, to recall me to my duty, and hasten me with her refreshment, we were joined by one of the Directors, who happened to be going up to town by the express. But his just and natural wrath, loud as it was, never moved the hungry old lady—no, not in the slightest degree. She never heard one word of it, and only mildly insisted, in the midst of it, that she was almost tired of waiting for her small luncheon basket.

With a fierce parting shot, the Director tried to make her understand that she had incurred a penalty of five pounds, but he couldn't, though he bawled it at her until the poor old thing—perhaps mortified at having taken so much trouble for nothing ; perhaps overcome by her hunger ; perhaps frightened of the commotion she saw, though didn't hear—sank back in her seat in a strong fit of hysterics, and let the shillings and sixpences roll out of her lap and settle under the seats.

It seemed to me a long time before we started on again, but I suppose it was only a six or seven minutes' delay, after all. I expect I should have waited to explain the stoppage to the pretty young girl of whom I considered myself a sort of protector, but, as I said, she was at the very opposite end of the train, and I was in haste now. There must have been a good laugh in several of the carriages when the cause of our stoppage got whispered about. As for me, when I shut myself again into my van, I chuckled over it until we stopped at Chalk Farm to take tickets.

It seemed to me that the train was taken into custody as soon as it stopped here.

"Of course you have the carriage doors all locked, and I'll go down with you while you open them one by one. My men are in possession of the platform."

This was said to me by Davis, a detective officer whom I knew

pretty well by now, having had a good bit to do with him about this Warwickshire robbery.

"It is no use," I said, "Before we started the train was searched, as you may say, at Rugby. Every passenger has undergone a close scrutiny, I can tell you. What causes such scientific preparation for us here?"

"A telegram received ten minutes ago," he answered. "It seems that two of the thieves we are dodging are in this train in clever disguises. We have had pretty full particulars, though the discovery wasn't made until after you left the junction. Have you noticed"—he dropped his voice a little—"a young lady and gentleman together in either carriage?"

I felt a bit of an odd catching in my breath as he spoke.

"No," I said, quite in a hurry. "No young lady and gentleman *belonging* together, but there may be plenty in the train. What if there are, though? There was no young lady *or* gentleman among the robbers!"

"Among the robbers," rejoined Davis, with suppressed enjoyment, "was a woman who'd make herself into anything; and you must own that a gentleman with a dark long beard isn't bad for a lady known to us pretty well by her thick red hair and a cut on her under lip."

"But the young lady?" I asked, cogitating this.

"Ah! the young lady. True enough; well, what should you say, now, if I told you she grew out of that boy that we're after, with the closely cut dark hair?"

I remembered the pretty plaits, and the loosely-falling hair; I remembered the bewilderment in the eyes which entirely hid their natural expression, and I didn't answer this at all.

"I wish I had as good a chance of catching the old fellow as I have of catching the woman and boy," continued Davis, as we moved slowly past the locked luggage van. "I know *they're* here, and that I shall recognise them under any disguise; but we've no clue yet to the older rascal. It's most aggravating that, by some means, we've lost sight of the biggest rogue of all. Come along."

I did come along, feeling very stupidly glad that there was all the train to search before we could reach that carriage at the other end, where sat the girl whom I had, in a way, taken under my protection.

"When are we to be allowed to leave this train, pray? Call me a cab," cried the deaf old lady, plaintively, as we reached her carriage, and found her gazing out in most evident and utter ignorance of all that was going on around her. "I am locked in, Gwa'd. Do you hear?"

I heard—ay, sharp enough; I only wished she could hear me as readily. Davis stood aside watching, while I unlocked her

door and helped her down. Then, seeing her helplessness, and her countless packages, he beckoned a porter to her, winking expressively to call his attention to a probable shilling.

Carriage after carriage we examined, and though Davis detected no thief, he turned away only more and more hopefully from each. He was so sure they *were* there, and that escape was impossible. We reached the last carriage in the line; and now my heart beat in the oddest manner possible.

"Is this compartment empty, then?" asked Davis, while my fingers were actually shaking as I put my key into the door of the centre one. "Empty and dark?"

"Even if it had been empty, it wouldn't have been left dark," I muttered, looking in. "Hallo! what's come to the lamp?"

I might well ask what was come to the lamp, for the compartment was as dark as if it had never been lighted; yet had not I myself stood and watched the lighted lamp put in at Rugby? And—the carriage was empty, too!

"Why was this?" asked the detective, turning sharply upon me. "Why was not the lamp lighted?"

But the lamp *was* lighted, and burning now as sensibly as the others—if we could but have seen it. As we soon discovered, the glass was covered by a kind of tarpaulin, intensely black and strongly adhesive, and the carriage was as completely dark as if no lamp had been there at all. Davis's perplexity was as great as my own; when I told him who had travelled here. "They couldn't have left the train *here*, at any rate," he said; and I knew that as well as he did.

But you have guessed the end. During those few minutes that we stopped on the line, the two thieves—darkening the lamp even after I had left them, and using their own key—had left the carriage under cover of the darkness; managing their escape, in their black dresses, out into the darkness of the night, as cleverly as they had managed their theft and subsequent concealment. But how could they have depended on this unusual delay?—this exquisite opportunity given them in the utter darkness, close to the city, yet at no station? When I officially made my deposition, and explained the absurd cause of our stoppage, the length of it, the truth broke upon us all; and it wasn't long before it settled into a certainty. Clear enough it was to everybody then that the older scoundrel had duped us more ingeniously than the younger ones. As the incapable old lady (deaf as a stone, and so blind that she had to peer through her glittering glasses with eyes always half closed, and so hungry that she had to stop the train for a luncheon-basket, while the confederates escaped) he had played upon us the neatest trick of all. Where on earth were the thick iron-grey hair and whiskers by which we were to have identified him? But by the time the

police saw the whole thing clearly, it was too late to follow up any clue to him.

The cab, which had taken the eccentric old lady and her parcels and flowers from Euston, was lost in the city, and could not be tracked. A high reward was offered for information, but no one ever won it. My firm belief is that it was no legitimately licensed cab at all, but one belonging to the gang, and part of the finished fraud. I verily believe, too, that sometimes now—though perhaps on the other side the channel—those three practised knaves enjoy a hearty laugh over that December journey by the night-express.

RICARDO'S BENEFIT.

"RICARDO, THE CHAMPION ATHLETE OF EUROPE, IN HIS WONDER-INSPIRING EVOLUTIONS. RICARDO, THE UNEQUALLED ACROBAT, IN HIS MARVELLOUS, UNRIVALLED PERFORMANCE ON THE VIBRATING WIRE, FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE INFIRMARY OF THIS TOWN."

I read the glaring letters rather more thoughtfully than I would have cared to confess, but my eyes rested longest on the one large red line in the centre of the long poster—

"NINETTE, THE EQUESTRIAN QUEEN."

Did Ninette, the star of the Royal Cirque d'Afrique, ever stop, as I did, to read the words that were so familiar? Did she ever feel, as I did, a thrill of pride at seeing our two names the chief attractions in the list? Did she ever feel, as I did, that we two, who were connected so closely—

"Signor Ricardo," cried a gay, clear voice behind me, "does it feel like looking at yourself in a glass?"

I turned quickly to Ninette, the gladness of my heart shining in my eyes as I met hers. And well might my heart and eyes be glad to see Ninette. Ah! so plainly can I recall, as I write of her, the little figure beside which I walked so happily that day—that day, for the last time. The supple form, whose every movement had a free, light grace which was like the unconscious grace of a little child; the pretty, happy face, whose white skin never needed powder and whose pink cheeks never needed paint; the blue, restless eyes, and the bright hair which lay in rings of curls on the low, white forehead and fell in longer curls behind. With the brilliant look of health upon her face; with the merry glance in her eyes; with the picturesque dress which she always chose; Ninette was a picture to gladden any heart indeed.

"I see it is a grand new programme, on purpose for to-night's performance," I said, as we walked on; "and, I see, too, that I am intended to eclipse you all."

“Or, rather, to eclipse yourself, Ricardo. You surely cannot imagine it would be possible for you to eclipse the Equestrian Queen?”

As Ninette spoke, we passed a high wall on which blazed a huge, coloured picture, representing a girl in an unnatural costume, standing in an unnatural position, on the neck of a most unnatural horse. I turned away my eyes, for this was supposed to be Ninette.

“What a look of repugnance, Ricardo!” she said, with her young, musical laugh. “Don’t you think it like me?”

“As much like you, Ninette, as the bare, sanded circus-ring is like a sunlit meadow of sweet flowers.”

Looking at her as I spoke, I saw the colour mount in her soft, bright cheeks. Not for a moment did I imagine that my words had called it there; and, looking for the cause, I noticed that a gentleman who met us had raised his hat to Ninette, with a long look of admiration. And then I walked on beside her, still more thoughtfully.

“You seem very cross, Ricardo,” she said presently, glancing coquettishly into my face. “I mean crosser even than usual.”

“Who was that gentleman, Mademoiselle Ninette?”

“I am not quite sure about his name,” she answered, with cool slowness. “He is a captain in the militia here, and he admires the Equestrian Queen immensely.”

“I suppose so.”

“Yes; he admires me very much indeed,” she continued, carelessly; “so he comes to every performance.”

“It is well, Ninette, that you win admiration,” I said, with quiet coldness; “you love it so dearly.”

“Don’t be grand, Ricardo,” she laughed, saucily; “just because *you* do not win it—nor love it dearly. Why, of course I love admiration. Stars always do.”

“I suppose so,” I said, my eyes full of it as I turned to read her brilliant little face.

“The sort of admiration I like,” answered Ninette, with complacency, “is Captain—O what shall I call him?—Captain Attendant’s: it has a charming halo of mystery and romance about it. And the sort of admiration I don’t care at all for, is that I win from our own company; your own, Ricardo, for instance, wearies me beyond all words.”

“You tell me this very often,” I said, speaking unsteadily; “but I cannot help its being yours through all.”

“Why don’t you give it,” inquired Ninette, with nonchalance, “to one of the other girls?”

“Such an idea is simply ridiculous,” I answered, in passionate scorn. “My love was won from me before either you or I could prevent it: now it must be yours for ever. You know this,

through all your treatment of me. Whether you are kind in this treatment, your own heart may tell you."

"Thank you, signor; but my own heart is very comfortable. I will not disturb it by unnecessary questioning. I wish you were as comfortable, for your own sake. How are you to get through your marvellous and unrivalled performance on the vibrating wire, O Champion Athlete, if you make yourself uneasy over trifles? Remember what is expected of you to-night. Monsieur says" (we always spoke of the manager as Monsieur) "that every seat will be filled, and that we shall have a grand night. He almost seems provoked about it, because he reaps no benefit; but I say, if we *do* profess to aid the Infirmary, let our aid be worth accepting. I wish I was going to do something great in such a cause, Ricardo, as well as you."

"It was given me to do," I put in, sullenly; "I didn't offer."

"Never mind that. You will help in a good cause; and I should like (in the same cause) to have ridden as I learnt to do in Morocco. I would have performed what Monsieur announced there as my Moorish Feat, if he would have permitted it."

"Oh, no!" I cried, quickly. "Never again, I trust, Ninette." For once I had seen Ninette make the daring leap, standing on one foot on Black Hawk's neck, and my heart beat with fear at the very mention of it now.

"Oh! I would," she laughed; "and yet I do believe I'm glad I'm not going to do it. I only feel I ought to have insisted upon it, for I expect Monsieur merely waited for that. As it is, the chief honour of this benefit devolves upon you, Signor Ricardo, and I am jealous."

"You know as well as I do, Ninette," I answered, rather hotly, "that you are always the one great attraction of the Circus—Monsieur knows it too—and that your name, standing alone, is a more powerful magnet to the public than mine is with all my feats emblazoned after it."

"Yes, I know it," she returned, laughing coolly. "Now, goodbye. I'm going to drink tea with Monsieur."

With a quick little nod she ran into the manager's lodgings, and I walked on to my own, with my thoughts still full of her. How I loved her! So oddly, too, that sometimes my own love almost bewildered me; its persistency having no hope in it, yet its hopelessness having no despair. It was a love that never was moved by her indifference or scorn, and never weakened by her contempt. She was proud of her own beauty and of her power over us all, and she never attempted to hide this; and though she never domineered over the female performers, who were all older and plainer than herself, she domineered most despotically over every male performer in the Circus. But she did it so

prettily and bewitchingly, that I was not the only one who had laid his love at her feet, to be trampled on at her girlish pleasure. I had but poor health even then, and this was one source of Ninette's merry sarcasm.

"The Champion Athlete has not an athletic appearance," she used to say. "I fear the signor is weak in every way." And then, with her eyes full of radiant health, she would demurely recommend me a Winter in the South, just because the Winter was coming on, and we were in the North. "I *must* laugh at you, Ricardo," she would sometimes say; "I get so dreadfully tired of you, unless I turn you into ridicule."

And I knew that she spoke the truth.

I was thinking, as I ever was, of this love of mine, and wondering how Ninette would choose to treat me to-night, when, with my great-coat over my performing dress, I entered the manager's ante-room. I was late, for I had not been well enough to hasten, and all the company had assembled, and were lounging or bustling about, according to their appointed tasks.

"Late, O Monarch of the Vibrating Wire," said Ninette, as I hesitated before her, looking at her, half enthralled and half amused. She was leaning against the table, in her crimson velvet habit—for she had no wonderful feats to perform to-night—the little crimson cap, with its white feather, set coquettishly on one side of her bright, fair curls.

"You look," she continued, saucily, "as if you had risen from a sick bed to perform for the sick. How interesting!"

I moved into the dimly-lighted building which surrounded the tent, and looked in at the performance.

"The Circus is crowded," Ninette whispered, as she sauntered out with me. "I hardly ever remember our having such a crowd, Ricardo."

"And I hope we never shall have it again," I panted, unbuttoning my coat. "The place is stifling."

"O, I hope we shall," she laughed, merrily, "I should like to see hundreds turned away from the doors, and no room left inside, even for one child more."

Ah! Ninette, how soon you were to have your wish fulfilled!

"We shall have a splendid gift for the hospital," she continued; "but, Ricardo, what do you think? A clergyman here—who was going to have a service in his church on Sunday especially for the Infirmary—has declined to do so now, because *we* have taken up its cause. He thinks—he says—" Ninette's voice was low and puzzled here, and her eyes angry; "he says if it will accept money earned—so, his conscience does not allow him to give it money from God's house. Why don't you answer?" she went on, impetuously, after a pause. "Why don't you say something angry?"

"It isn't worth speaking of," I replied, though I think my heart was as hot as her own. "It is only worth laughing over."

And then Ninette, looking searchingly into my face, did laugh, her clear, happy laugh, though the puzzled look still shone in her bright excited eyes.

"Yes ; we shall send a worthy present to the hospital, I hope, and trust, and believe," she continued, slowly, "but our help is only to lower it—or, at least," she went on, as I tried to interrupt her in hasty dissent, "good men think so."

"One man—who *ought* to be good," I put in, contemptuously.

"One man," she rejoined, the puzzled look deepening again, "speaking for many who think as he does, and who understand this as we cannot. And yet—and yet—Ricardo, look at that mass of eager, expectant faces. Why do they come to see us and encourage us, if we sin in what we do? Why doesn't the world show us so, in the only way which there would be no withstanding? Does this thought bewilder you, too, Ricardo?"

It had bewildered me many and many a time, but I could not tell her so ; for the very shadow of the fear that this life, in which we were so much together, might be wrong, made me shiver coldly. Her earnestness, which had been almost appealing, vanished suddenly.

"Never mind," she said, with her quick laugh, tossing back the bright little head in its velvet cap, "all lives have their aching, troublesome moments, I suppose. There, they are waiting for your first feat, and your greatest. Go on, signor, and prosper."

With her pleasant words in my ears, I went in amid the deafening applause of the crowd, and, bowing slightly, walked across the ring. I thought nothing of the mass of faces rising in rows, but I remembered that Ninette could see me, and that she had said I was helping in a good cause. I felt that I performed as I had hardly ever performed before, and the long applause was again and again renewed, as I left the ring. What would Ninette say? Would she congratulate me? Passing through the dimly-lighted building outside the tent, where the horses waited, I caught sight of two figures standing aside in the shadow, and talking low and earnestly—Ninette and the gentleman whom we had met that morning. I had often seen him in the circus, and noticed his evident admiration of Ninette (but then did not every one gaze at her in admiration?), but I had never seen him out there among us before, and I started, as I came up to them in the gloom. Ninette carelessly turned her eyes upon me for a moment, then went on talking ; coquettishly and flippantly, it seemed to me. I took her horse from the man who was bringing it forward, and myself led it towards her

"Are you ready, Mademoiselle Ninette?" I asked, my voice trembling against my will.

"Ready? Why?" she inquired, with slow contempt.

"Allow me! Oh! pray allow me, Mademoiselle!" exclaimed the stranger, starting forward. And Ninette, smiling, put her foot into his hand.

Seating herself in the saddle, with the utmost ease, she carelessly, as it seemed, backed Black Hawk against me.

"Signor Ricardo," she said, haughtily, "is this the spot where the gentlemen of our company usually rest between their exercises in the ring?"

An ironical answer rose to my lips, but I withheld the words.

"Stand back, if you please, signor. Must you always follow me, always haunt me? Stand back."

With a quick change of voice, and a bright, shy smile, she bent to take her little gilded whip, as the officer handed it to her.

"Thanks, Monsieur le Capitaine."

And whilst she bent gracefully, and seemed to be only stroking the neck of the splendid black horse, she reined him in skilfully and imperceptibly, until he touched my shoulder.

"Gently, gently, my hawk," she said, feigning utter unconsciousness of my presence, "would you fly too soon?" Then, with a demure face, she cantered through the opening in the canvas.

"A most proud and bewitching little equestrian queen," said the young officer, appearing much amused by my discomfiture, "but, like old Rome, I suppose you can well 'bear the pride of her, of whom yourself are proud.'"

I turned away without answering; and for the first time Ninette performed without my eyes following her graceful movements. The strange gentleman sauntered to the opening in the tent, but when she rode back, flushed and triumphant after her success, he came forward again eagerly. She drew up her lissome little figure, with a dash of odd pride, and turning Black Hawk rapidly aside, sprang to the ground unassisted. Her part was played for that night, and, while the loud clapping within was continued, she walked slowly out into the darkness; her long crimson habit over her arm, her little cap pushed from her bright excited face, and her eyes raised to the young officer who walked beside her.

Thus I watched them going together under the awning out into the night, and then I went back to complete the "wonder-inspiring evolutions" for which the crowd waited; while my heart seemed breaking in its jealousy.

After that all is a burning confusion in my brain, until one evening when I awoke to consciousness, in the hospital for which I had been performing, and heard the physicians (who had seen

me fall, and had attended pityingly upon me ever since) whisper that all would be well in time.

"Ricardo, dear fellow," said Monsieur, coming forward, softly, and bending to whisper to me, "thank God all will be well. The worst is over."

I hardly know when the knowledge dawned upon me, or how; but as I lay there—my old companions elustering round me—I knew that I had performed among them for the last time. I knew that life had most wonderfully and mercifully been spared to me; but that I should never walk again. I do not remember that the knowledge came with any sharp or bitter pain; I think it was a quiet, hopeless conviction from the first. They had given me a small room in the hospital, to myself; partly to spare others the sight of my suffering; partly, perhaps, as Monsieur said, because I had hurt myself in their cause.

So the days and nights passed on; and slowly, slowly brought me a little ease at last.

One morning Monsieur, entering my room with a brighter face than usual, told me Ninette had come to see me. I felt the blood rush into my wan face as I took her little warm hand in both my own.

"Oh; you are so much better, Ricardo," she said, her small lips trembling a little as she looked at me. "We shall soon have you back in your place among us."

I shook my head slowly.

"Never again, Ninette."

"Why?" she asked, in feigned astonishment.

"I shall never walk again anywhere, I think, Ninette; certainly not on the vibrating wire. I know I must be a—be lame all my life; and I'm trying, as I lie here, to get accustomed to the thought, and to feel prepared."

"No; no!" she cried quickly. "Don't try to get accustomed to it, Ricardo. Try to think of getting well, and that will help you to do so."

"Will it? Then I will try," I answered, struggling with my sadness. "When do you leave here?"

"Leave here? Oh, I don't know. Not till you are well, I should think. Why, Ricardo," she added, as I smiled incredulously, "don't you know that to-night we are all going to perform for your benefit? You've not heard, you say? Why what has Monsieur found to talk to you about then, for he talks to me of nothing else? I wish I could have brought you one of the enormous bills, headed 'Ricardo's benefit,' in letters as large as myself. You always were fond of reading your own name in the bills, weren't you?"

"Yes—with yours," I answered, intently watching the bright face.

"Well, you would have seen mine too to-day, in letters almost larger, for I'm going to—ride."

"Of course," I answered, with a faint smile, while I wondered a little at the sudden change in her voice. "What audience would there be if you did not, Ninette?"

"None," she laughed. "You must wish me success before I go away. But here's Monsieur come to dismiss me. I've been telling Signor Ricardo," she added, as the manager joined us, "various particulars of his Benefit. How very willingly we all give our services, and how all the town is patronizing us."

"And did she tell you?" asked Monsieur with a pleased and excited look, "how I offered to double the prices of admission if any one would promise a novelty, and how she herself immediately proposed to perform her Moorish Feat? I'll show you one of the handbills. Here it is. 'Mademoiselle Ninette, the Equestrian Queen, on her magnificent steed Black Hawk, will——'"

"Oh! no, no, you must not let her," I exclaimed, in hasty fear. "Oh! Monsieur, it is most rash and dangerous."

Monsieur smiled as he put the handbill back into his pocket, and Ninette rose with a vexed glance across at him.

"Do forbid her to do this," I cried, again.

"Mademoiselle Ninette is such a superb horsewoman," the manager said, "that if she feels she can accomplish it safely and brilliantly, I feel so too. And it will make to-night's performance an unrivalled success. She has done it before, you know; and a gorgeous and unprecedented triumph it was."

"It is a wilful risking of life," I faltered, the tears starting in my weakness. "I shall be miserable."

"I shall not," laughed Monsieur, rising, "I have too much confidence in Ninette."

"Don't think about it at all, Ricardo," Ninette said, giving me her hand as she prepared to leave. "I should never have told you myself, because I know how invalids worry themselves about the safest and most trifling things. I have made up my mind to do it; and Black Hawk understands it all."

"Oh! do not venture it, Ninette," I whispered, appealing to her in bitter earnestness, "Say you will not."

"I *must*," she answered, laughing lightly, though she spoke with odd, steady quietness.

Then I covered my eyes with my feeble hand, and let the tears flow on.

"I shall come in and see you before the performance," Ninette said, after a little dismal pause.

"Will you, Ninette," I asked eagerly, as I battled with my cowardice. "Will you come in as you go?"

"I hardly know about that," she answered, with a quaint, shy

smile ; "I have a startling costume in which you will not recognise me."

Monsieur had left the room then, and Ninette was standing opposite me, about to follow him.

"Ninette," I said, slowly, as I feasted my eyes on her sweet face, "when I saw you first you wore an old black habit, quite rusty I remember ; and you had a hat in your hand, with a long scarlet plume almost touching the ground. And however I have seen you since, you have always been to me as you were that day—and you always will be, dear."

"I remember that old velvet habit," she laughed. It is a superannuated article now ; and—what did you think of me then, Ricardo ?"

"Just what I think now."

She laughed again, but her step was soft and lingering when she left me.

Until evening I lay and thought of her ; picturing the beautiful little figure that would come to me, in its gorgeous theatrical dress. The twilight glided slowly into my silent room, and then I lay and listened breathlessly, for I knew she must come soon now. Yet so noiselessly she entered at last, that even my waiting ears could scarcely catch the light step. Without a word she shut the door behind her. Then she stood looking at me, her red lips parted with an irrepressible smile, and her eyes brimming over with fun. But she was clad in no gay, unusual dress ; she stood there holding up, in one hand, the old black habit ; while from the other dangled the little hat with its scarlet plume ; and her head was only crowned with its bright, fair curls.

"Ninette," I said, breaking my wondering silence, "seeing you so, I feel as if, through the years that I lie helpless, I could dream that you have been to me all that I wildly dreamed you might be, when I saw you so for the first time. Thank you for coming as you are ; but you will have to change your dress again—you ride in such a different costume."

The colour rushed to her cheeks, and her eyes grew hot and dark.

"Yes, very different ; but cannot you think of me always as you see me now, Ricardo?—as you saw me first ? The people are passing the hospital gates in crowds," she went on, turning and looking through the window ; "I expect a fuller house than we have ever had in England. It is for your sake, signor."

"I wish I thought so," I said, very earnestly ; "I wish I did not know they go to see your wild and daring leap, Ninette. How terrible it will be to witness—for those who love you !"

She laughed a low, quick laugh, but did not turn to me.

"You are thinking of Captain Attendant, I daresay, Ricardo.

But you need not, for I have never spoken to him since the night you—fell ; and I never shall again."

A wild proud joy sprang up in my heart.

"Ninette," I cried, "my darling, turn your face to me. I am so helpless here, and shall so soon lose the face I love. Come to me for these few precious moments."

Very gently she came up to me, and laid her cool hand upon my forehead.

"This excitement, of course, is bad for you, Ricardo," she said, tenderly ; "and I know it is bad for me just now ; it unnerves my heart and hand. I think," she added, with a little sigh, "that everything that comes naturally to us, seems as if it was to be bad for us. Do you—do you remember what the clergyman here said, when we performed for his hospital? O, I should so like to know if that could be true."

"Can it be true, dear, when our Father's mercy is as wide as Heaven?"

"Hush, Ricardo!" she interrupted, with a quick breath ; "you and I do not understand that kind of thing, and—we may be hoping without foundation. He said—said it, and wrote it, and published it—that no modest English girl would do what—I do ; and that no noble and pure-minded man would make himself a spectacle, and risk his life as—as you did. O, Ricardo, was it true?"

"No," I said, firmly and quietly.

"I know I've been thoughtless and flippant," she went on, very low, "I know I haven't tried, as I might have tried, to make my life noble ; but I don't feel that my heart has been different from the hearts of modest English girls ; and indeed—indeed—my life has been more full of temptation than that of any girl who has a quiet, guarded home."

She bent her head, and as I laid my weak fingers on the soft curls, one deep sob shook the little kneeling figure, but when she rose, her eyes were very bright between their glistening lashes. She did not say a word of farewell to me. With a strange, brave, smile—which would have vanished with a word—she hesitated a moment ; her cheeks flushing, and her lips wistful. Then quite suddenly, with just the slight gesture with which she acknowledged the plaudits of the crowd, she left me.

I lay and listened as the carriages rolled past the Infirmary gates ; and presently across the river, I could hear our own band strike up merrily. I could follow in fancy the whole performance, as I lay with the programme before me, and the well-known airs to guide me. At last, with a quickened beating of my heart, I felt that the time was come for Ninette's appearance. I knew the very tune with which the band would greet her. Ah ! there it was ; but almost drowned in a loud, prolonged applause.

Then—knowing she was performing—I lay quivering in every limb.

It was just as one of the hospital physicians came quietly into my room, that a great shout rose on the other side of the river, and rolled joyously across to me. My blood burned in my veins.

"That is to greet her after her leap," I said, speaking aloud and rapidly in my intense relief. "Thank God it is over!"

"We must all feel glad it is over," said the physician, gravely. "Such a feat should never have been attempted."

"And yet every one is gone to see it," I answered, as the nurse turned the pillows for my restless head. "Why did they encourage her?"

"Such things *would* be done, in any case," he answered, "at least we judge so; though perhaps we do not try it, for certainly every one has gone to see this leap to-night; all our own household like every one else's. Yet how can we help disapproving such a dangerous act, performed too, by a young and beautiful girl, whose life must be one long temptation to display—if to nothing worse?"

"Listen!" I cried, in sudden terror, pushing away the nurse, and starting up with panting breath, "Did the band stop then—suddenly? Hark! it is all silent."

I remember faltering incoherent appeals to be taken to the circus; and I remember how they tried to soothe me, laying me back upon the bed, and drawing down the blind before my wild and staring eyes. But in that hush across the river I knew that I had had my deathblow.

They brought me no tidings for days. They kept me in darkness, within and without. But when at last my brain was calm again, and my eyes had lost their restless fever, they told me some few particulars of that fearful night.

Ninette had performed her dauntless feat with perfect success. While she stood daintily upon his neck, Black Hawk took his leap smoothly and safely. But the astonished crowd had not been satisfied with this; with a persistent cry, they had summoned her again; and summoned her in my name.

"As the seats for to-night have been taken at double price," she had said, laughingly, to Monsieur, "I owe the audience a double appearance."

And so she had ridden in again triumphantly, and springing lightly upon the neck of her horse, had prepared again for her wonderful leap.

Then came the hush—though no one ever could tell me exactly how it had occurred; some saying Ninette was unusually excited by her brilliant feat; and some that she was tired. She fell—fell with a light, sudden fall which would not have hurt

her, perhaps, but that her temple struck the boards which separated the front row of spectators from the ring.

Thank God that there had been no struggle! There was one red stain upon the soft, fair curls; but no anguish on the young, dead face when they lifted it so gently.

In the rare, sweet dreams which visit me as I lie here, I always see Ninette just as I saw her first—just as I saw her last. And when I awake, I am almost glad to see, in the faces round me, that the time is drawing very near when I shall see her once again.

WHAT OUR ADVERTISEMENT BROUGHT.

DEBORAH had an idea. She repeated that fact several times before she would tell me what the idea was. We had just been going over our account-books for the twentieth time that week ; and had seen, more clearly than ever, that we must begin in earnest now to live on half as much as we had allowed ourselves during the life of our stepmother, whose jointure died with her.

Well, the question was—and had been ever since the funeral—how were we to manage this ? We had sold the pony-carriage and dismissed our manservant, but even without those luxuries, we could not keep on the old country-house, in which so many rooms were unnecessary to us. Our old lawyer said, "Let the house, just as it is. I will find you a good tenant who will not spoil the furniture, and the rent will make your income sufficient." Deborah grew hysterical at the idea, and I had some difficulty in bringing her round. Other friends gave other advice. "Sell all the house contains ; you will be sure to have a good sale. Add the proceeds to your capital, and you can live very comfortably on the interest ; especially in—Dieppe, for instance."

The thought of this banishment from England was hard enough ; but that other thought ! Sell the furniture which we had cherished for—well, never mind exactly how many years, for Deborah and I were not quite so young as we had been ; the furniture whose polishing we had always ourselves personally superintended ; and which we ourselves veiled in holland every night. Sell the plate which was our great and natural source of pride ; the plate we counted every night with unction before we entertained the thought of sleep ; the plate which was the envy of our neighbours at every party we gave. Sell the furniture and plate ! The proposal was a stab in our most tender part.

We had talked over our affairs a great deal—it was very cold weather, and sitting over the fire discussing a subject of such importance was not disagreeable—but we had arrived at no defi-

nite conclusion, when Deborah so abruptly told me that she had an idea. When she was at last prevailed upon to explain, this was what it was: "Suppose we take a house in London large enough to do credit to the chief and best of our furniture, and receive a gentleman to board with us. What he would pay us would make the rent as easy for us as if we took a pottering little house, which I'm sure would kill me. This would be an advantage in many ways, don't you see? We should have somebody in the house who would appreciate the plate and the comfort of our home, and we need not part with the things we are fond of. There, Lavinia, that's my idea; what do you think of it?"

Afraid of committing myself if I answered rashly, I took a long time to deliberate. But I came to think with Deborah, because I could not propose anything else on my own account; and it all came to be settled so.

Two months after that, we were beginning to feel settled in our house in — but I think, for several reasons, I had better not say in what favourite suburb of London; and the greater number of our favourite goods and chattels were about us. The house was certainly one of a terrace, and we were too country-bred to relish that, but still (as Deborah said) it was all the safer.

Gradually we grew to know our neighbours a little—by sight I mean, for a seat at the window is as pleasant as in any other part of the room. But one we knew personally, having chanced to make his acquaintance on our first arrival. He is a bachelor, living next door to us, and, for all profession, he is "on" one of the daily papers. I'm sure I don't know exactly what it means, or why he should be there, when he looks clever enough to be an author or a poet; but he says he is "on it," and seems satisfied; and so, as Deborah says, "it is unnecessary for us to regret it." I should not have fancied it very profitable for a gentleman to be on a paper that you can buy anywhere for a penny, but I don't know what to say when I see his house, for it is handsomely furnished, and there is only himself and his housekeeper to occupy it. The first floor of each house in this terrace contains a drawing-room to the front and bed-room to the back. Mr. Hall sits to write in the drawing-room, and sleeps in the room behind. In our house that is the bed-room we want to let; and, though I say it that should not—also Deborah who should not either,—more comfortable rooms than ours could nowhere be found. "You should not say so, Lavinia," Deborah used to plead; "still if *any one* has a right to look for a permanent and grateful tenant, I think it must be ourselves."

The next thing, of course, was to get this permanent and grateful tenant; and we began to draw up our advertisement;

for Mr. Hall (that is our next door neighbour on the left—the house next to ours on the right is unfortunately vacant—had told us emphatically that an advertisement was our best agent. We drew it up between us. Don't imagine that I mean we drew it up that night. No; ours was not an advertisement to be hastily composed within the limits of one evening. That was Saturday, and by the next Thursday it was ready for us to leave at the office of the paper; for we knew the post was no vehicle for such a document as this.

"Eleven shillings," said the clerk, counting the words as indifferently as if they had been common-place ones.

"Eleven shillings!" echoed Deborah ruefully. "Is not that rather high?"

"It's a long advertisement," he remarked, looking as if he carelessly weighed it with his eye.

"You counted very rapidly," commented Deborah, politely. "Do you feel as if you had been quite correct?"

I do not wish to say the young man was not civil, but I was conscious that his expression too nearly bordered on a laugh. Besides, though he appeared to count again, he held to the eleven shillings; and Deborah had to pay it too.

"Of course, as the charge is so high, the advertisement will be inserted at once," spoke Deborah with confidence. I was sorry once more to remark in the young man an inclination to smile, because otherwise he was well behaved. And indeed, it is due to him here to state that he evidently *did* exert himself on our behalf, for next day our advertisement was in.

To us the paper seemed to contain nothing else, though I remember that many people said, about that time, that the daily papers were filled with the Claimant.

"It reads beautifully," remarked Deborah. "That one idea of mine, about full liberty with the comfort of home, tells excellently; not that I wish to take the credit, Lavinia; we will look upon the whole as a joint composition."

Which view I took also.

"That idea of inviting a call is good too," continued Deborah. "You remember my saying *that* would take, when I first proposed it. Now make haste over your breakfast, Lavinia. Some one may call directly. Each one would try to be first. I will go at once and change my dress."

And Deborah rose, to my intense surprise, without waiting for her second cup of tea. "Don't be excited," she said, putting an antimacassar into her pocket and dropping her handkerchief. "I am always calm over these things. Dear me, Lavinia, how mean the other advertisements look beside ours."

We could not have a pudding *that* day, so I was soon ready to join Deborah, and prepared to entertain our callers as they might

flock to us. We had put on our tabby silks and garnet ear-rings, and I think we looked very nice indeed, and not nearly so anxious and frightened as we really felt. Mary Ann, too, was dressed, and sewing in her tidy kitchen; for though I didn't myself fancy that any gentleman would ask to see the kitchen, Deborah said one never could foresee what London people might do.

Well, though that was one of the longest days I ever spent, I need not make it so long in the telling. At dark, when Mary Ann came in to close the shutters, Deborah and I were still sitting in our tabby silks, working at the Berlin work, which we always kept to take out to tea with us, and trying to look as if we always wore shot silks and garnets, and had not put them on for any special purpose in creation. But when she asked whether "the gentlemen we were expecting would be here to tea, and how many cups she should bring in," I really thought Deborah would have an attack of some kind.

I was very glad to see the tea come in: it did us both good. I was inclined by that time to give up all hope, and the feeling (though laden with despair) brought with it a certain sense of relief. I put my chair exactly in front of the fire, turned up my dress, and put my feet on the fender: not so much because they were cold, as because the attitude was such a thorough change. But Deborah was more thoughtful. "Gentlemen engaged in their offices all day," she said, "will only be able to call in the evenings."

We cheered up again at that idea. The house looked so warm and bright and snug, that we congratulated each other on the gentlemen not having called until now. Slowly the evening went on, leaving us undisturbed.

"I wish Mr. Hall would drop in," sighed I; "this is such a waste of our best silks."

"And of the fires all over the house," added Deborah.

An hour's pause, during which I managed to snatch forty refreshing winks.

"Eleven shillings was an exorbitant price for that advertisement," ruminated Deborah presently.

We went to bed an hour earlier than usual, feeling as if the day had been a week long; but next morning we rose almost as hopefully as we had done the day before. I could not let Mary Ann make the lemon pudding—it is one of the things she never *will* learn to do properly, and in which I am very particular, and, perhaps, I may add, successful—so Deborah was stationed alone for some time in the drawing-room, sighing that her best dress would soon not be worth picking up.

And just think of it! I had only that minute finished the pudding, when the knock came. I stood in the kitchen, my heart fluttering, as I heard a manly voice and step in the dining-room.

In less than ten minutes I was entering it myself, with as affable a smile as I could assume on so short a notice, and in my tabby silk and garnet ear-rings too.

There he was; an elderly gentleman with a smiling face. It struck me pleasantly upon the instant that he was just one to enjoy a lemon pudding—if well made. He rose with gallantry and bowed to me. I offered to take his hat and stick, which he was nursing, but he would not hear of troubling me. So I smiled again, and sat down.

"I have called in consequence of your advertisement," he explained to me, politely. "It was a very attractive advertisement, and a young friend of mine, who is seeking a home, requested me to come for him, as he is particularly engaged this morning."

I had no idea what it would be becoming in me to say, so I bowed; thinking what a very low charge eleven shillings was for that advertisement.

"This young friend has been living with me for some time," continued the elderly gentleman, "and I am anxious that in another home, he should not miss any of the luxuries—I hope I may say luxuries—to which he has been accustomed. I wish him to meet with a home superior to those generally offered to young men by advertisements. Yours appeared to me to be just such a one." Here he smiled at me. I suppose he had said the same and smiled the same at Deborah before. "Now may I ask," he continued, pleasantly, if you make an extra—a—matter of the—say the linen and plate?"

Here was a glorious opening for Deborah. She told the elderly gentleman a chapter or two of our family history, and the reason of our taking this house, dotting the information with hints of the great value of our plate and linen; indeed, she almost went so far as to supply him with an inventory of them. And the elderly gentleman looked a little bit bored as he listened.

"I should like to show you the plate," concluded Deborah, waxing more and more chatty.

At first he seemed to think it would be troubling her very unnecessarily; but perhaps he fancied she would be hurt by his refusal, for he came round laughingly to express a wish to see our treasures. Deborah took him to the plate closet, while I hovered in the background, looking on and listening, while he admired everything to our heart's content. After this we went upstairs, in a procession of three, to inspect the drawing-room. The elderly gentleman, still caressing his hat and stick, said there was no doubt about *that* being a pleasant and handsome room—and, of course, we entirely agreed with him.

"And this is the bed-room, is it?" he questioned, airily, as he moved into the back room.

His question drew Deborah in after him, but I lingered at the door. This was not a drawing-room, you see.

"Nice room," he said, heartily, as he sauntered up to the window.

I began to tremble when he reached it, for the view from this back window was not attractive. Just below ran the roof of the sculleries; beyond that a long strip of garden, ending in a wooden pailing, and then the backs of other houses; and on the left a wide, bleak brick-field.

"A very fair, open look-out," remarked the elderly gentleman, and the beating of my heart grew regular again. "I am sure my young friend would be hard to please if he were not satisfied with this," he continued, smiling graciously. "Let me consider; is there any other question I ought to ask? Have you any—any other gentleman residing with you?"

Deborah rather haughtily refuted the idea.

"There is no one in the house at all," she concluded, "but my sister and myself, and the domestic."

"And the domestic—of course," he repeated, pleasantly, "and very comfortable must such an arrangement be. I can only hope my young friend will not unpleasantly intrude on your gentcel and refined privacy. And now," he added, giving a last look round the room, "I have only to thank you for your kindly-proffered information. I am sure my young friend will decide to take up his residence with you, and will doubtless wish to come at once. One thing—pardon my mentioning it, ladies—the venetian blinds, being new, have a—have still a slight odour clinging to them, and the odour of paint is *not* too agreeable. Might I suggest that the window should be opened a little?—allow me—a very little is enough. There, half an inch—quite sufficient. I trust you pardon the liberty of the suggestion."

We thought it a kind suggestion, and it was natural for us to tell him so. Deborah and I did so in concert, as we tripped downstairs before him. Midway, the elderly gentleman paused and looked back.

"I see," he said, with a wave of his hand, "that my young friend will sleep alone on this floor."

"Would that be a drawback?" inquired Deborah, with a sudden access of anxiety. "Was his young friend nervous?"

"Nervous—yes, a little, the elderly gentleman allowed, regretfully; "but only on the subject of fire."

Deborah and I both hastened to explain how we always saw the fires put safely out before we went to bed; then the elderly gentleman's mind appeared quite set at rest on behalf of his young friend. There seemed nothing more to say, so he brushed his hat with his hand, bade us good-bye, put on his hat, went out upon the steps and took his hat off again, with a backward glance

and bow. Presently, through the dining-room window, we saw him drive off in a hansom which by chance he met. I felt in a most exuberant state of delight, but contented myself by remarking stolidly that it had all turned out very well.

"Well!" echoed Deborah, ringing the bell twice as she spoke. "Didn't I tell you what that advertisement would bring? How cleverly we managed it! Now we must explain it all to Mary Ann; she must be prepared and instructed. Put out the sheets, Lavinia,—and how about the towels? And as for that new dozen of frilled pillow-covers—what a good thing I'm not excitable, else I should be in a pretty state now. How slow Mary Ann is, and I want a hundred things done. Don't interrupt me when I am giving my orders, Lavinia; do be calm.

Our preparations were not entirely over until night, though (looking back now) I cannot remember any important thing we did, except airing linen. I had determined to sleep on the spare bed, to keep it well aired, for fear the elderly gentleman's young friend might be susceptible of cold. Only as I went up to my own room to prepare for bed, did I close the window of the spare room; the new blinds should have the benefit of the air till the last moment. But I did not trouble myself to fasten the window, because I should have had to mount upon, or move the dressing-table.

Deborah laughed at the notion of the three only inmates of the house occupying a storey each; but I was firm, and passed on in my dressing-gown to my own room. I have two strong prejudices—one against locking myself into my bedroom, the other against sleeping in a lighted room; so, without turning the key or lighting the gas at all, I slipped into bed, drew the eider-down quilt up to my very nose, and went off to sleep at once—as any one should do, with an easy conscience and a good couch.

In the very dead of the night I was awakened by a slight sound as ever could have awakened any one. There was no glimmer of light in the room. If there were any from the sky or lamps without, the darkened venetian blind shut it entirely out. At first I thought that a sound in the street, a long way off, had disturbed me; then I fancied it was in the next house. But a moment afterwards these fancies were swallowed in the alarming certainty that this sound which had awakened me had been the skilful, cautious opening of the window of this room in which I lay alone—so small and femininely helpless.

The blind was moved almost noiselessly, and then the faint light from without showed me the dim outline of a man's figure coming softly and slowly into the room. Oh! where had been my common sense when I left the window unfastened? Where had been my common sense when I volunteered to keep this bed aired?

I lay in a death-like stillness, knowing that the very slightest movement might cost me my life. The room was so thoroughly dark that the very keenest eyes in the world could not have detected me; nor have distinguished the bed itself, under its crimson quilt. The dressing-table scarcely creaked beneath its cautious burden, yet I felt that my ears, sharpened preternaturally by fear, could follow every step of the man, as he descended from the window-seat into the room, and then stealthily advanced towards the door. I knew by instinct how skilfully he must be piloting himself. I felt the bedstead vibrate under me, while for a few steps he guided himself by holding the foot-board. I followed his tread across the carpet, step by step, to the door; I heard the handle turned; and then I lay quite still in a horrible, sick fear.

But when I could hear the step safely outside—even there I could follow it, soft and cautious as it was—I breathed once more, and the stillness which I felt had saved my life became suddenly unbearable to me. My first impulse was to jump up and turn the key in the door; but in an instant I recollected that it was left on the outer side, as we had been in the habit of locking this room when we passed up to bed. If I attempted to go upstairs to Deborah the robber below might hear me, and, knowing himself discovered, would certainly rush up and murder us three defenceless women. No, I could not venture outside that door which the burglar had closed behind him. Yet how could I let Deborah sleep on, with robbery and death so near her?—or how could I leave the ruffian to help himself to all the valuables the house contained?

Even while I thought no plan was open to me, I had unconsciously determined what to do. I was even then groping for my dressing-gown—white though it was, I could only find it by feeling. My slippers I dared not put on, for fear of a sound betraying me.

As cautiously as the thief had done, though far less skilfully, I crept step by step along the carpet. I moved the blind as he had moved it, though now it seemed to make a sound which all the terrace could hear; then I climbed to the window-seat, and let myself down to the leads below. Yesterday these leads had looked to me close to the window—painfully and objectionably close—now they were so far below that I seemed to be falling down a precipice. And oh! the sensation in my bare feet when they touched the wet roof!

I had no doubt in my mind now as to the course I intended to pursue, or the quarter from whence help was to be obtained. Mr. Hall himself slept in the back-room on the first-floor of his own house, and from him I knew I might expect assistance in my need.

I had never noticed until now that a kind of low brick wall ran up the leads, separating the houses. I came upon it unexpectedly in my chilly, groping passage, and, however much in daylight I might have hesitated or feared, I climbed it, and went up to Mr. Hall's window. It would not do to allow myself time for shyness or compunction. I rapped against the glass; I rapped again and again. Of course the room was all in darkness, but still I fancied I could wake Mr. Hall. I remembered that he told us once how often the cats wakened him, and I remembered, too, that Deborah said gentlemen on newspapers rarely slept. Again and again I knocked. If he had been as sound a sleeper as Mary Ann, he must have wakened at such a summons—always supposing he had been there. So at last the dreary conviction stole upon me that he was not there. Then I felt that I must shriek out aloud in my despair, though I knew it would disturb the burglar, and bring him out to me with his drawn knife.

Just then a light burst upon me, carried by a gentleman, who had drawn back from the window, on observing the extraordinary spectacle of my figure on the leads; and then I saw Mr. Hall himself close to me.

"Miss Lavinia,"—he spoke as courteously as if I had been in the drawing-room at home, in my tabby silk and garnet earrings, but I could see how hard he found it to say anything at all—"tell me what has alarmed you?"

I forgot then all about my novel costume—I even forgot the wet and cold. With a sob of relief to begin with, I told him everything, only interrupted by fits of coughing. He listened astonished and excited, while the gentleman within the room gradually lost his scruples, and drew quite close to the window to question me.

"We were sitting together downstairs," explained Mr. Hall. "when we fancied we heard a knocking somewhere, without being to able to distinguish where—at least, I fancied it, while my friend ridiculed the very idea. But we decided to go over the house together, and had reached this room, when I saw you. I am glad my friend is still with me, for we will collar this scoundrel. You say you did not lock the door after him?—that's right—at least, it will be all right if we can ensure his trying to effect his escape in the manner he effected his entrance. It will not do to make any alarm, because if we rouse Miss Deborah, she will naturally run downstairs, and may perhaps fall right into the villain's way. At the same time, we must not give him the chance of letting himself out by the front door while we lie in wait for him here. Fielding, what plan have you to suggest?"

Fielding, then, was the young man who had come up close to

us now, in a most indifferent manner. I—I hoped I should never see Mr. Fielding again after to-night.

“It will hardly do for us to separate,” he said, pondering, “for if he has only one man to elude, he may be prepared to make short work of it.”

I remember putting in a disjointed speech here, to the effect that, if they perilled their lives, I could never enjoy mine again; but they only smiled, instead of promising me.

There was a silent pause, while they cogitated, and I had leisure to—to feel exceedingly uncomfortable.

“I’ve thought of a plan,” said Mr. Hall at last. (I think that being on a daily paper makes a gentleman unusually quick.) “What do you think of it, Fielding? I will take Miss Lavinia down, while you keep watch here. As soon as I have let her through our front door, I return to you, and we take up our station one each side that next window. Meanwhile, she goes to her own front door, and knocks a ready, natural, fearless knock, which will startle the thief, and make him hasten to this back window, where you and I will have the pleasure of seizing him.”

Broken so abruptly to me, the part I had to play seemed terrible; but I knew nothing else could be done. I remember, with a haunting distinctness, that journey of mine from the scullery roof to Mr. Hall’s front door, under his guidance; but I remember with what thoughtfulness Mr. Fielding made himself invisible as I passed through the gas-lit room. I remember creeping down the stairs behind Mr. Hall, while I thanked him in my heart for never mentioning a light. Then I remember the silence with which he gave me his own slippers, and let me out into the chill, wet street.

And then to think of me! Standing at my own door in the middle of the night, in my dressing-gown and Mr. Hall’s slippers, tapping a long, prompt, natural knock, and waiting for what might follow. Would it be admittance, or a cry of murder, or *what* would it be? I wondered as I stood there shivering as if with ague (for one generally wonders at a time of the keenest dread, if only a moment of inaction intervenes) whether any one else in all the quiet sleeping street had ever spent such a night as this; I wondered what the policeman would say to me when he passed, as he certainly must do in about another moment; then I wondered how soon we could sell our furniture and let our house, and go away where I could hide myself on some lone mountain side, where this story could never reach.

A fit of coughing interrupted this arrangement. How many hours ago was it I had knocked? Had I better rap again? Surely the day must be dawning—surely by now the marauder must have killed both my gallant, brave preservers, and escaped in safety through the garden?

Interminable as this waiting-time had seemed to me, the morning had *not* dawned—the policeman even had not passed—when our door was opened to me by Deborah herself, alive, and apparently unmaimed, but as white as a sheet. At first we intended to faint in each other's arms, but something prevented it—a call to us from the bed-room on the first-floor.

“I heard the sounds in that room,” explained Deborah, excitedly, amid her tears, as I put on a waterproof in the hall, “and I thought it was you, and went down. I couldn't wake Mary Ann, though I tried all the time I was dressing. And then, when I went to the door, they—they told me they had got him safe—the murderer—in the dark there. Oh! Lavinia, I shall never sleep again. And they sent me to open the door to you, and—and——”

We had reached the bed-room by this time, and found that the gas had been lighted; and there, sitting right under it, tied in his chair, and guarded by Mr. Hall and his friend, sat the ruffian burglar. If ever there were in the world two women who might have been knocked down by one feather, those two women were Deborah and I; for this robber and marauder was the elderly gentleman who had called in answer to our advertisement; the elderly gentleman who had been anxious that his young friend should find a comfortable, airy home with us; the elderly gentleman who had been particular about the plate and linen!

Deborah told all this in a breath, begging me to be calm; but she might more naturally have begged this of Mr. Hall and Mr. Fielding, for they were laughing and enjoying themselves tremendously, at the spectacle of this elderly gentleman piteously entreating to be released, and begging them to take the silver from a lot of hidden away pockets. I've always been glad since, that they did not leave the decision to Deborah and me; for he was a practised villain, you see, and might have done endless mischief elsewhere; which he cannot do now.

That very night Deborah and I quite determined we would leave London at once; and we made our plans, crying all the time from excitement, and weariness, and disappointment; and the prospect of another removal, after having just got comfortably settled, and spending all our surplus money.

Next evening, while I was nursing my cold, and we were both as melancholy as we could be, in came Mr. Hall, and that young friend of his whom he had called Fielding. At first I was aggravated, and thought why couldn't they have come yesterday when we had on our tabby silks and looked so comfortable; but presently I forgot all about this. That night-adventure seemed to have made us all suddenly into old friends, and we laughed together over the burglary; and somehow—through the way Mr. Hall put it, I'm sure it was—I entirely forgot that my part

(or even appearance) had been out of the common, and began to coincide with an implied sort of belief that Mr. Hall and his friend had managed it alone, and Deborah and I had only been required at the last moment to identify the ruffian. This view of the case suited me very well, and we got on most amicably to other matters. Other matters? Why I speak of them as if they were ordinary ones; and yet—and yet here was the *real* answer to our advertisement.

Mr. Fielding was seeking a home, he told us, and had a wish to be near his friend, though he could not live in a house that had not—as he expressed it—a lady at its head.

“And I do hope,” added Mr. Hall, genially, “that you will take him, Miss Lavinia. I want him near me, yet my irregular meals and hours would kill him. He has been used to the care of a mother and sister, and would miss them sorely in a bachelor’s house.”

Well, before that visit was over, it was all arranged, and now he lives with us; and is, as it were, one of us. He says he never misses his mother’s care, having ours; and perhaps it is true, for Deborah and I have grown to love him well. And besides that, no one could more thoroughly appreciate the plate he rescued; or more thoroughly enjoy a good lemon-pudding.

ONE WINTER NIGHT.

FIRST NARRATIVE.

THE wind blew keenly from the north, and cut like frozen knives. Out in the darkening street my horse and gig stood waiting, and the December twilight gathered.

"Why, bless me, Annie, I might be going to Japan!" I exclaimed, buttoning my great-coat hastily, not caring to show how unwilling I was to lose the warm touch of my young wife's loving hands. "Be quick, dear, and hand me over the case of watches from the hall-table there."

"I wish you weren't going alone with these in your pocket, George," she said, looking from the compact Geneva box in her hand, up to my face; "it is worth more than sixty pounds, and I'm sure it isn't safe for you to carry it."

"Who's to know I carry it?" I laughed, as I packed it into the long inner pocket of my overcoat. "Besides, it will be worth less when I bring it back, so the danger will be less. Cheer up."

"Oh, George, it's nearly dark already!" broke in Annie, piteously, as she shudderingly turned in from the open doorway. "People oughtn't to hold clubs on Christmas Eve. I'm sure, after attending to business all the week, you ought to be left to rest and enjoy yourself on Saturday evening. And I'm doubly sure that after attending to it all the year you ought to be left to enjoy your Christmas Eve."

"I *shall* enjoy it, dear," I said, as cheerfully as if the words were not an egregious falsehood. "I shall enjoy my drive, and my hot supper at the 'Miners' Arms,' and one or two other things. If it had been an engagement for this one night only, I might have begged off; but, you see, dear, it is the beginning of a year's engagement which I should not like to lose. Indeed, it may go on for years, and we are not rich enough *quite* yet to refuse a good prospect. Eh, love?"

"I don't know anything about it, except its disadvantages," fretted Annie.

"I will explain once more, dear," I answered, knowing she

would like the few minutes' delay, "though I believe it is the hundred and fiftieth time I've done so. Twelve of the men at the Bog-mines have formed a club, which is to meet, on the night of every fourth Saturday, at a little public-house called the 'Miners' Arms.' Here I am to join them, with a good choice of silver watches on approval. They each pay in to me ten shillings, then draw lots, and the winner has a watch of the value of the six pounds. There will be one winner every night, and one watch sold, so at the end of the year each member will have a watch. They all go on paying through the year, but those who draw the lots of course get one less in number every month. Any one can have a watch of higher value than the six pounds by paying extra, so I take some with me that are more expensive. I hope you see the advantages now, dear, as well as the disadvantages; and will make the best of it, even on a bitter December night."

"George—but, George," whined Annie, as dismal after my satisfactory explanation as she had been before, "think of my having to spend Christmas Eve here all alone."

"Only a few hours, after all. I shall be home at midnight to let in Christmas for you, never fear."

"I don't believe you will, George. They will keep you, or it will snow, or something; and it is a long fifteen miles' drive each way. You can't be *sure* to be at home."

"I can, and will, dear. Why, how downhearted you are! I don't think I ever saw you so before."

"I shall be so dreary, and lonely, and sad, George."

"Not for long, love, because I shall be home by twelve to let in the Christmas. There, that's a promise, and you know whether I've ever broken a promise to you. Now let me go. The shop is to be shut early, that the men may enjoy their Christmas beef and pudding and songs. But I hope they will have dispersed before I come home—at midnight."

"*Quite* sure you'll be home then?" pleaded Annie, still detaining me.

"Quite sure, my anxious little darling. What troubles you this evening? Are you afraid that that funereal-looking quadruped outside will run away with me, or that a dead and gone Duval will run away with my property?"

"And you promise to come and let in the Christmas for us, George?"

"I promise—yes. Now good-bye in reality."

I took my seat in the gig, and drove off rapidly, to make up for lost time, kissing my hand to Annie as she stood in the lighted doorway watching me off. Down the gaily-lighted High Street, through the busy, slatternly suburbs, then out into the wide, chill country. It was an ugly drive from the town to the Bog-mines,

even on the brightest day of Summer ; but no words can describe its bleak and bitter cheerlessness, or its utter solitariness, on this December evening. Now and then, certainly, a cottage skirted the road, and when five of the fifteen miles were travelled, I passed through a small and scattered village. Beyond this the turn-pike road led me straight on through the flat and boggy country. Quite the most isolated dwelling I saw was a little cottage across a field, about six miles from town, which I knew to be the home of a lame old Roman Catholic priest, who lived there with a bedridden brother. A good old man, always ready to help the sick and sorrowful. I had never seen him, but I knew him well by report ; and had more than once had my attention called to the little house—neat and well managed—where the two old brothers lived alone. After I had passed that, there seemed to be no human habitation for miles ; and as far as I could see—which certainly was not far—the prospect was gloomy enough : a wide, flat expanse of country intersected by dim hedgerows, and broken by spectral outlines of the bare Winter trees. I drove on as fast as I could, while the evening darkened into night ; and the wind drove past me, threatening snow. I began now, for the first time, to wish that the inauguration of the club had not been arranged for to-night ; and to wish more earnestly still—what I had often and often wished before—that I had for company one of the dogs that used to be the friends and companions of my boyhood ; ever ready at my beck and call ; eager and glad to follow me anywhere ; repaying my fondness for them by their faithfulness and devotion to myself. Above all, I wished for the intelligent old mastiff which had left the farm and lived with me in town until two years ago ; which would have been with me now, but that Annie did not like him, and so when I married I gave him away. I never told her what a struggle it had been to me to part with him ; because, after all, what was his loss to me in comparison with the companion I had gained ? Afterwards—when I felt at times how pleasant it would be to me to have one of my favourites about my house—I would broach the subject to my wife ; but, seeing it was distasteful to her, I never urged it. Now—as often at such times—I could not help recalling longingly my old dog's attachment to me ; his pleasant companionship ; his protecting watchfulness ; his strong and steadfast affection, which I had won simply by having rescued him from a trap when he was a puppy, and nursed and cured his broken leg. Yes, I would give much to have him with me now. Yet, how could I fret for this, when I could gratefully think and dream of the little one who would soon have its place at our loving, cheerful hearth ? And then, of course, I fell again to picturing the dear young face that had watched me from the open doorway, pale and wistful in the gaslight. What a merry night we

ought to have been making of it—Annie and I—dropping now and then into our favourite occupation, of adding story after story to that Spanish castle, founded on our retirement from business with a princely competence. It was rather early, perhaps, to make arrangements for the event, but it was just as well to be in good time. And when you *are* looking on into the future—vague to the best of eyes—isn't it just as easy to see things rose-coloured as blue?

In these pleasant dreams, I drove on until the mines were round me, and I drew up my horse before the low public-house where I was to meet the club. All the members had assembled in a long, well-lighted room, with a sanded floor, and an immense fire roaring in the chimney. While I stood before it, restoring life to my petrified feet and fingers, I looked round at the dozen men who had their places at the table, and I voted them a set of kindly, noisy fellows. But as the evening wore on I modified my opinion. One or two were sullen and moody, thwarting every amendment, and drinking a great deal, in a kind of gruff and greedy silence. One or two were boisterous and contradictory, dropping ready oaths from their lips, and bringing down their fists heavily upon the table, to enforce their rough and noisy words. And others were quiet, orderly men, with very few words to say, and a very deliberate way of saying them. But, among them all, I noticed one most particularly; far above his companions in cordiality and kindness; quite the most pleasant, the most genial, and the most intelligent man there. He behaved to me, too, with a certain quiet respect which most of the others dispensed with, and which is rare indeed among the Bog-mines. How could I help being glad when this man drew the lucky lot, and won as beautiful an English lever as one need wish to see? But, with a hearty cordiality, the man offered to have the lots drawn again; he could wait, he said, and some of his mates had set their hearts on it. I negatived this proposal at once, objecting strongly to it on principle, and the watch went slowly the round of the table for admiration, while its owner took this opportunity of going out into the yard to tell the ostler—who was a friend of his—that he had won it. I did not wonder at this at the time, but afterwards I understood it. I put up the remaining eleven watches, and packed and tied the box. After enjoying the hot supper—at which I was a heartily-welcomed guest—and the steaming punch which followed it, I drew on my overcoat again, and buttoned it snugly and safely across my chest, with the box in its long inner pocket. Just then the ostler came into me with a puzzled face. My horse was lame, he told me; “dead lame, and would not stir.”

“Lame! What on earth——?”

But my exclamation of incredulity and astonishment was only

met by the stolid assurance the horse *was* lame, and it would be as much as his life was worth for me to take him out to-night. I simply could not and would not believe it, and hastened to the stable; most, if not all, of the company following me. Well, there the horse lay, "dead lame," as the ostler had said. There was no chance of *his* taking me home that night, at any rate. I had not lived through all my boyhood at a farm without understanding a little about horses, and I felt certain that there had been foul play here. I could have sworn that a pick had been run into the flesh under the knee, and I knew that the animal was useless indeed now. I could not prove the deed, of course, but I felt almost as confident of it then as I did four hours afterwards, when I could feel certain *who* had done it.

"You'll have to stay here till morning, sir," the landlord said. "We'll make you quite comfortable."

"Impossible," I answered, thinking a hundred thoughts at once.

"But isn't it a case of necessity, sir? There's no other conveyance in the place."

"No horse?" I exclaimed, knowing I could not for a moment entertain the proposal of staying.

"None at all, except my own pony, sir; and I couldn't possibly let you have him, because he's got to carry me twenty miles as soon as it's daylight, to spend Christmas Day with my old father."

"Have none of you a horse here?" I asked, appealing, in desperation, to the miners. "I will pay you anything you like to ask me, for the use of one to-night."

No; no one had a horse at his disposal, or could tell me any one who had; and all joined in mine host's persuasions to me to sleep at the "Miners' Arms."

"Even if the horse is incapable in the morning, sir," they said, "and you've still to walk, it'll be better in the daylight than now in the dark. There'll be plenty of snow directly, and it's likely to be a frightful night."

Not for one moment, though, did I hesitate when I thought of Annie; of the anxious night she would spend waiting for, and vainly expecting, me; of the dreary dawning of the Christmas morning for her, if I did not keep my promise. True, I could not be home at midnight to let in the Christmas for her as I had promised; but the delay was not my own fault, and at least I might let it in for her at dawn, and prevent its breaking sadly and drearily for my wife. I never yet had shrunk from a fifteen miles' walk, even in the dark; so I said good night to the miners, with a laugh which was intended to prevent *their* laughing at what they evidently thought a Quixotic intention, and started briskly, while they called a "Good night, sir," cheerily after me.

On and on I went, thinking busily, as one naturally does on a long solitary walk. But presently the snow began to fall ; and though it was but slight at first, the quiet, pleasant thoughts were soon dispersed ; and so I sang aloud for company, shouting lustily, to keep myself warm as well as cheerful. And, when I was tired of that, I whistled old familiar airs, and improvised eccentric variations. Anything to shorten the long, long stretch of whitening highway ; anything to deaden the piercing blast of the night wind.

I should think I had gone a couple of miles, when I heard footsteps on the road behind me. My first impulse was to turn and wait for the society of any traveller who might be journeying on my way ; but my second was to quicken my steps with a nameless fear. This impulse I followed resolutely yet blindly ; but as I hastened on, the steps behind me hastened too.

No house or human being was there within sight or earshot. I had valuable property about me, and not even a stick in my hand. I saw what a random fool I had been in starting at all from the "Miners' Arms" to-night. I saw it all, with a flash of pain and despair, as the steps behind steadily gained upon me. I hurried on, trying to believe I only did so because of my promise to Annie ; but I knew it was really **fear** which quickened my breath and my footsteps, though fear was not a usual sensation with me. The tread behind quickened as mine quickened ; and presently two men overtook me, one joining me on either side. Their faces were covered with black crape, and each carried a stout stick in his hand. When the first accosted me with a slow impertinence, I recognised the voice of that member of the club who had most of all exerted himself to entertain me at the "Miners' Arms," and who had offered to give up his lot when he became the lucky winner of the watch. My ear is quick to recognise voices, rarely deceiving me, and the voice of this man was peculiar. Before his insolent speech was ended, the second man broke in, and I felt I could detect the voice of the ostler who had told me of the lameness of my horse.

"Come, shut up," he said to his companion. "What's the use of talking to him ? He's only got to hand over the watches—we want nothing more of him."

"That's it," said the first man, readily. "That's what we want," he added, addressing me threateningly, "so be quick about it."

I saw one thing plainly enough—it would be of no use for me to feign ignorance of what they meant, so I simply asked them what they were going to do with the watches. A stupid question enough ; but I caught at any delay, as I walked on unprotected, between the two strong, roughly-clad men, with their masked faces and their stout sticks.

"It's no use for you to quibble over what we say," the first man put in quickly; "it only wastes time, and we don't care to spend much in this climate. You've nothing to do but pass us over those watches you brought from the public, and your own watch and chain—we happen to know they're worth having. Come, do it at once, or it'll be the worse for you."

"I wonder whether you understand that the descriptions and numbers of these watches are all taken?" I said, still for the purpose of gaining time; "and I wonder whether you understand that the police will be at once on the track of the thieves? You'll wish the watches anywhere but on your persons then, I'm thinking."

I believe I said it as coolly as any one could have said it under the circumstances; but I saw that the men were little impressed by the import of my words."

"We'll settle all that between ourselves," the ostler said, with a grating chuckle; "and as you don't seem inclined to hand that there box over peaceably, we'll just help ourselves. Go ahead, mate."

"Come, look here, you fellows," I began, with a sudden attempt at cool defiance, "I know you both well enough, and can swear to you before any judge in England. Don't you think it would be your wisest plan to go off before you've seven years' transportation to look forward to?"

"Leave those little personal affairs for us to settle," sneered the miner; "we'll look after ourselves when we leave you to-night. Come, look sharp, that we ain't tempted to make your swearing to us rather harder than you could wish. Don't ye see that we're two of us, each with twice your strength, and there's no help within a couple of miles."

"Now then, mate, stop this ridiculous trifling," put in the other man, sullenly. "I won't wait a minute longer, dawdling here in the cold. As he won't hand the things out without any fuss, we'll do it for him, and do it sharp. Tie up his mouth with the handkercher, and pass me the cord."

My mouth was gagged in an instant, as it seemed to me; and, while I fought frantically at the ruffians, they seized my wrists, and bound them round and round with thin cord, piercing the flesh until the blood came.

"I've got 'em safe enough, and I'll tie 'em so," muttered one fellow, with a jeering laugh, while the other had his great ugly hands tight on the breast of my coat. "Hold hard one moment."

Just as the man spoke, and tied the first link in the cord, there came towards us slowly, from the hedge on our right, a great black mastiff, his shaggy head raised, and his sharp grey eyes shining in the dim, weird gloom of the snowy night. He hesitated a moment before he reached us; then, with the shrill

bark with which a mastiff generally prepares himself for an attack, he rushed upon the fellow who was holding me, seized him by the throat, and throwing him down upon his back, stood with his forepaws on his neck and chest. Shall I ever forget the man's abject, craven fear, as the dog's fierce eyes met his so closely; as the dog's white fangs gleamed between his drawn lips, and his angry, panting breath rose and fell upon the man's own ghastly cheek?

"Call you bloodhound off!" cried the other man, drawing back from me in terror.

Of course I saw it was best that they should think, as they naturally would, that the dog was mine; so I answered with a light, satirical laugh,

"You don't know much of mastiffs if you think that such a one as that would let his master be waylaid. With a word, I can have you sprawling there beside your rascally companion."

I spoke it confidently enough, feeling that both my life and property were safe; but I could not help hoping he would not force me to prove my words.

"Call him off!" he cried again, shivering as he looked at the dog, who—evidently and unmistakably ready to spring to the assault in a moment, as only a mastiff can—watched every movement of one man, while he held the other, his great shaggy-haired chest heaving quickly.

"You'd be safer, you and your cursed accomplice, if you were ten miles away now," I said, almost jauntily.

"Now then, sir, take him off," the man answered, suddenly affecting a jocund innocence. "We were only frightening you, to test your pluck. I wonder you didn't understand that from the first. Take your dog on, please, and let us get back; we've been long enough over a joke."

Seeing that the man's fear was most thorough and unfeigned, I looked the dog steadily and kindly in the face and whistled. I knew that it was such a whistle as my own dogs used to understand and answer to, in the old days, but I was not without a sickening fear that the animal knowing me a stranger, would ignore my call, and so, perhaps, make his rescue of no effect. Slowly he shook his great black head and shaggy breast, raised his fore feet deliberately, one at a time, and turned to join me. The man on whom he had been standing, still lay prostrate in the snow, too much terrified to attempt to rise while the animal was near.

"Good dog!—noble fellow!" I whispered, in the low, caressing tone which I knew that dogs are keen to understand, and quick to appreciate.

He looked up into my face as I had often seen my old favourite look, and then walked on so close beside me that I could touch

his hair with my hand ; and I knew the men would not follow me now. Silently and watchfully he walked, his step utterly noiseless on the fast-deepening snow.

Fast-deepening, indeed ! Each moment it fell thicker and thicker. Each moment it lay deeper and deeper under my tired feet—for I *was* tired already, as I never remember to have been before, after only a three miles' walk. Only three miles even yet, and twelve to come. I threw away the match I had lighted to enable me to read the figures on the milestone, and started again on my toilsome way, dazzled by the white expanse of deepening snow, and wishing with all my heart that I had been an habitual smoker, and had a pipe with me now. Before I had gone another mile, the aspect of the weather had completely changed. A fierce gale set in from the south east, driving clouds of snow before it ; and through this I fought on, until it seemed to me I had been battling so through a whole night. Yet, probably, it was not more than an hour, and I had made no progress worth speaking of, though little strength seemed left to me. I could not look up now, while I pressed on against a wind that literally screamed as it passed me, and drifted the snow in heaps against the gates and hedges. Did I ever remember such a sudden, blinding snow-storm as this, in my life before ? Never. I plunged my hands deep into my pockets, to warm them, but, even in their thick driving-gloves, they were benumbed and helpless. My strength and spirit were failing. Nine or ten miles to walk even yet before home was reached ; and it seemed as if I could not make any way, fighting on in the teeth of the furious wind. I felt that, long before those nine or ten miles were travelled, the road would be impassable, and my strength exhausted. Faster and thicker the snow fell now, and weaker grew my efforts as I struggled on through it, the strong wind drifting it so that, at times, I stumbled up to my knees ; and the gale rose, and the snow fell faster every minute. Another hour's painful effort. The glaring white lay all around me, unbroken by a single track, and my sight was growing dim and confused : still I fought on against the killing blast of the gale. Now and then it blew me completely down, but I always could regain my footing, and always the dog waited for me.

"Little use, I fear, old fellow," I said, thankful to hear the sound of my own voice, and resting my hand on his soft, warm head ; "it is only to give it up a little further on. Good, helpful fellow !"

On and on, and still no house in all the wide expanse. My pace had slackened to a crawl, and all hope of reaching home was gradually dying within me. I knew well what fate awaited me, unless I could reach a human habitation soon. I knew that the fatal temptation to sleep was creeping over me, and I felt I

had not strength to battle with it and save my life. Only a little further, and my perished limbs would have done all that they could do.

Starved, benumbed, and sleepy, I struggled on in the teeth of the storm; my eyes blinded, my steps clogged, and always growing upon me that irresistible longing to sleep, against which I fought with every power of mind and body. Sometimes I fancied I heard wheels rapidly overtaking me, and I would stop in sudden hope; but a moment served to show me it was only the peculiar effect of the wind, and that no wheels could have been heard, even if they could have travelled, on the deep snow. My hands were now dead to all feeling; I could not distinguish what I touched when I laid my fingers on the dog beside me. My sight, too, was surely going; I saw the faithful mastiff only as a dim blot upon the dazzling white. I began to fancy that, though I could see no house in all the wide expanse of glaring snow, there might be one even close to me, which I should pass unknowingly; and then a great babyish longing came over me to cry—to cry, with the icicles thick upon my eyes!

And now all my strength was exhausted, and without knowing at all how far I still was from home, I knew that the end of my walk was come. Under some sheltering bank, perhaps, where the snow was deep and soft, I could rest. I was worn out, and *must* sleep; the desire was irresistible and overwhelming. Somebody was waiting at home for me—I knew that, vaguely and dreamily—at home—a long way off.

"I'll go presently, when I've rested. Good dog!—good, faithful fellow!—you want rest too."

Beside a roadside gate, half buried in the snow, I fell. I felt all the pain and anxiety going from me as I lay, helpless and motionless, in the snow, and I yielded at once to the fatal temptation to sleep, which I had resisted as long as I had power to do so. The dog, which had until that moment kept close beside me, ran at the gate and leaped it, while I watched him sleepily, sorry he should leave me, yet powerless to entice him back. There was a low, distant singing in my ears, growing more and more confused. My eyes were closed, and the snow-flakes covering them, when, with an eager bark, the dog put his head through the bars of the wide gate (scattering as he did so, the snow that lay deep upon them), and pulled at my coat, shaking it hastily and impatiently. I was only dreamily conscious of his motive, and it was more to avoid the worrying than to obey him, that I rose with one last effort, climbed the gate, and tottered on beside my guide. And now I seemed to crawl through, as well as over, the snow that had drifted here deeper than out in the highway; and, for the last time, I battled fiercely and determinately with the

lethargy which held me. Was my faithful dumb guide leading me to human help? I prayed aloud, as I stumbled on, that it might be so—prayed while I could feel that the power was still mine, knowing it would soon desert me—but I fancy there came no sound from my stiff lips.

“Is help near, good dog, strong, faithful fellow? No; all white and desolate. White fields—with just faint signs—of where—the hedgerows run. What a wide—solitary—place—to die! Good dog;—brave friend!—leading me to—help—and—and—rescue.—How it all swims and trembles—the—great—wide—white——”

SECOND NARRATIVE.

My poor brother is sleeping like an infant. There lingers not, in this sleep, even a shadow of suffering on the dear, worn face. I kneel beside him, keeping my Christmas Vigil. Midnight has passed four hours, but I cannot weary of my prayers to-night, feeling so grateful for my brother's ease, feeling so deeply, in my own calm heart, the peace and promise of the Christmas morning. I hear no longer the crying of the night wind, driving the snow before it against my windows. The fury of the storm has worn itself out. Through all my seventy years, I cannot remember such a sudden and terrific gale before. I wonder how long this comparative calm will last? Hark! It is broken already by a strange sound without—a sound I cannot understand. Is it the quick, eager bark of a dog? No, it is a human cry for help. No; *what* is it? I open the window for a moment, and distinguish only a faint rubbing or scraping against the cottage door. Something, surely, is wanted—some help, perhaps, which Our Lady, in her infinite pity, will allow me to give in her name.

I close our bed-room door softly, and pass down the narrow stairs, as quickly as I can in my lameness and my feeble old age. Without waiting for a light, I open the outer door, and there, in the light which the snow gives, I see a man lying alone and dead upon the threshold. Dead, I think in my first glance; but when I raise him with care and tenderness—a sob of pain rushing up from my heart at sight of him—and take him into the fireless, cheerless kitchen, he opens his eyes, and gazes round him in vacant bewilderment.

“Stop!” he says, in a broken, eager whisper. “Where’s the dog?”

I had looked round searchingly while the door was open, wondering whether the man who lay there in the snow had been alone, and so I knew there had been no dog with him. I see that

his mind is wandering, so I only tell him, soothingly; that the dog is all right.

"Let him in," he says, pointing back to the door with a piteous smile. "Is he your dog? He has been very good to me."

I turn aside the question. I cannot tell him we have no dog, nor that there is no other house near here, for it would betray the alienation of his mind. I open the door just to satisfy him, and he, still supported by my arm, looks with me into the silence. We can see distinctly all over the white field that surrounds my cottage, but no dog is there. I close the door hastily, just as my visitor loses all power and consciousness. Old as I am, I can carry him up the stairs. He is but a slight young fellow, with a delicate, handsome face, which has a certain courage about it, but is pale with a ghastly pallor. I have seen many men rescued after being lost in the snow, but it seems to me that I have never seen one so near death as this.

His clothes are frozen, his fingers are stiff and shrunken, with no sensation in them at all, and his eyes are fearfully bloodshot. I carry him to our room, and undress him; then I take my brother—wide awake now, and troubled that he cannot help me—out of bed, and lay the poor unconscious gentleman in his warm place. There is but slight chance of my being able to save his life, but that chance must be tried to the uttermost. I take my brother down in a blanket to the old couch on the kitchen hearth; then I pile dry sticks in the grate, and soon have a cheerful, crackling fire to help me, and to comfort him. Then I go upstairs again to my invalid, and, taking one hand or foot at a time out of the bed, I chafe it with the snow I have brought in a bowl. As soon as the fire is ready, and I have prepared it, I dress him, still unconscious, with a cup of hot mint tea.

He has been in bed almost an hour, when he wakes to consciousness, and starts up, with a wondering, agonised look into my face.

"Where am I?" he stammers. "Have I been to let in the Christmas?"

I feel that the words are still the delirious wanderings of a sick man, so I only soothe him as best I may, and tempt him to another cup of the strong, hot tea. He rises, with sudden, feverish strength, and gropes for his clothes.

"I must go on at once," he says, speaking almost clearly. "Thank you, but I *must* go on now—home. The anxiety will kill my wife. Has the day dawned?"

"Not yet. It will not be daylight for three hours yet; but the storm has ceased."

"Thank God! I shall be in time."

No need to tell of my useless persuasions, entreaties, com-

mands, repeated again and again. They are of no avail. Every plea I urge is turned aside, every argument is disregarded, every persuasion falls unheeded on his ear. As long as I can I keep him, and it is almost by force; but my weak old will is conquered by his steadfastness of purpose, and I am obliged to let him rise and dress. He would put on his own soaked and frozen clothes—which I have hung before the fire, and the steam from which fills the kitchen—but in this matter it is I who conquer. Clad in my best clothes, I let him go at last. God pardon me if I have not done what I can to keep him! I have tried and failed, and I begin to think there may be some urgent reason for his going which I do not understand. I follow him to see him on his way. The snow still makes it light about us, and he will not take a lantern. As I make my way across the field, with immense difficulty, I pray ceaselessly that he may not be hastening to his death; and once more I appeal to him before we separate, miserable when I listen to his broken words of thanks, and wishing, with all my heart, that I was not too old and lame to take him to his journey's end, to the home where I know there must be a young wife dearly loved. A moment after he has left me standing at the gate, he hesitates. I see a pleased, slow smile come into his face, which is only half turned from me; then he stoops, and moves his weak hands softly and slowly, with an odd movement which I cannot understand; almost as if—the idea, though unnatural, *will* come into my head as I watch him—almost as if he were caressing a large dog. The fancy is born, perhaps, of his delirium, and it vanishes while my weak, dim eyes follow him into the white gloom of the night. The furious, crying wind is resting now, but the whole country is covered with the dangerous, drifted snow. I go back into the house, too anxious to think of going to bed myself, too much troubled to be at rest save as I tell my beads.

THIRD NARRATIVE.

I HAD never in my life spent such a lonely evening before. I think I never felt so unaccountably depressed; yet I knew it would not last long, because George had promised to be home with me at midnight, and he had never broken his promise to me once, since we had known each other first. This expectation took me on, through the long hours which he and I ought to have been spending cheerfully and merrily together. I went downstairs to bid our men good-night, and wish them “a merry Christmas,” as they dispersed after their gay evening; then I hurried back gladly to the sitting-room, stirred the fire, re-arranged the coffee-

cups, and put George's slippers exactly in the right place for him; for midnight was striking from twenty clocks at once—as every hour does on our premises—and he would be home directly now. I sent the servants to bed. No one should let in the Christmas until George brought it, though we had always done it before while the clocks were striking and the church-bells ringing. The bells were ringing now, of course, yet I could not hear them, for the terrible wind that shrieked about the house, and scattered wildly and weirdly the snow that was falling so fast. It was no use my listening for his step—I knew he would leave his horse and gig at the livery-stables and walk up the street—yet I *did* listen, with every power I possessed, as I sat waiting there alone—did listen for a footfall which must be soundless on the rapidly deepening snow.

Could George break his promise to me? One o'clock! I cannot bear one o'clock; I think it is the loneliest hour of all the night. It terrifies me to hear the solitary stroke from the clocks below, even when George is with me. But to-night it struck me like a great throb of pain. Could George break his promise to me? That was still my doubt and cry, because it was better to think that, than that any accident could have happened to detain him. I opened the shutters once; but the street was so white and solitary, and the wind rushed by with such a shriek of distress, that I dared not do it again. I crept close to the fire, which burned half-way up the chimney, yet I shivered as if I had been out in the wind and snow.

Two o'clock! And still I listened for a footstep, though the snow was deep enough now to deaden the tramp of a thousand men. Now and then I fancied I heard wheels pass, but it could only have been the raging and roaring of the terrible night-wind outside the shuttered windows. Ah! what a weary, weary thing it is to listen for a step one cannot hear!

Three o'clock!

But when I try to recall the hours as they passed, my very heart-beats cease. The anguish of that night I know will live through all my life—the long, vain, helpless watching. I knew that nothing which I could have been suffering then *with* George, would have been so hard for me to bear as this. I wished I had kept one of the servants up, but I shrank from calling her. I had sent them to bed in the full expectation of my husband coming directly after they had left me; and now I could not summon them—partly because I dreaded to see or hear their fear, partly because I dreaded letting them see mine. The storm had lulled before the dawn drew near, and then I sat and waited in the silence, thinking *that* more unbearable than the rolling of the savage wind had been. I could call the servants up now, and go myself to find George, for the dawn had come at last. I knew

that I looked worn and white, as if I had been ill for months, and that they were frightened by my looks when they saw me. If they had told me I was dying, I should not have felt surprised ; but I must die there—where *he* was. I never thought of a broken promise now. I knew that something terrible had happened to him, and I could not breathe longer in the doubt and suspense. Surely I could start now. I tried to open the shutters, but my fingers trembled so helplessly that I hurt them in the bolt, though I could not draw it. Just as I gave up the attempt, and went out upon the stairs, I heard a slow ring at the hall-door bell. Not George's ring ; yet never for a moment did I doubt that I should see *him* first, when I opened the door. My fingers did not tremble now. I could draw back the heavy bolts, and unfasten the chain. The faces in the street would be bright and fresh—full of happiness to begin the Christmas Day ; what would George think of mine when he met it ? The door was wide open ; the chill grey light crept into the hall ; and in an instant I forgot my own pale face, for one look at my husband had chased everything else from my head. Deathly, ghastfully white, he stood propped against the doorway, gazing at me vacantly and wistfully. The clothes he wore, and which I had never seen before, hung loosely about him, torn and frozen and bloodstained ; his head and one foot were bare ; his hands groping feebly towards me, were grey and wrinkled. I put my arms about him in a sudden terror. I think I felt that he was going from me : and—what did it signify whose eyes could see us ?

"George, George, my love," I whispered, as I almost carried him in—for my strength seemed to grow tenfold when I saw his weakness—"home at last !"

I could not utter one word of questioning, far less of doubt ; I could only try to cheer him, and bring some look which I should recognise, into the wandering eyes.

"Home at last, dear George ! And I've a beautiful fire, and hot coffee, and chops ; but I think brandy will be best now—because you are so—so cold—and—and——"

But my weak attempt broke down here, in frightened sobs and kisses.

"A happy Christmas, darling."

The voice was so unlike my husband's bright and cheerful voice that I dared neither answer nor look up. I literally carried him up the lighted stairs—I, who that morning would have said that to carry him one step would kill me !

"Don't forget the dog, Annie," whispered George, slowly, rising in bed to speak to me the more earnestly. "Be good to him, and feed him, and warm him."

"Yes, dear," I said, smiling into his dim eyes, and pretending that the words of his delirium sounded quite natural to me.

I had given him the hot brandy and water, and was waiting anxiously now for the physician. And the chiming of the Christmas bells went on, and on, and on.

"He has saved my life three times, Annie ; from robbers—from starvation—and from—death in sleep. Be good to him, dear."

"Indeed, indeed, I will."

And the wandering eyes grew a little quieter then.

"Home now—in time to bring in—the Christmas morning. Yes, just in time. A happy Christmas, darling. Just in time. He saved me, to be in time. A happy—Did I say it—Annie ?"

With a great sob then, a sob which made me shiver as if struck with death, he fell back lifeless on the pillow.

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The crocusses are blooming in our windows now, and George is able to go out with me to breathe the fresh Spring air, and watch how the woods are slowly brightening into green ; but he has not yet lost the traces of that night's suffering, and of the long illness that followed. Ah ! what a time it was ! Night and day I watched him fighting with his pain, until they shut the door against me, and I could only suffer with him—oh ! how keenly ! in my thoughts. When they let me go to him at last, the agony had worn itself out, and, in the utter exhaustion which followed, there was a kind of rest. I laid our little baby boy beside him, and saw the gentle, happy smile upon his lips, and the great gladness in his eyes ; then I let the little one be carried away, and I took my own place beside my husband, the place which I could never bear to leave. My long fear and watching are over now, and I can recall that night even with gratitude ; but George never speaks of it but with a wondering awe which half bewilders me, and which I feel that I shall never be able to understand.

WE FOUR.

WE were sitting in conclave, we four sisters. It was not a remarkable thing for us to be sitting in conclave, because we did it over everything, from a proposal of marriage to the choice of a new bonnet (the latter event of much more frequent occurrence than the former), but somehow to-day we seemed to be *more* in conclave than usual. No wonder either, when the absorbing topic under discussion was the approaching proposal of marriage for Joan, from our cousin, Max Curew—not that we were calling him cousin then; when we did so it was only because he was present. He was only a second cousin (almost as good as no relation at all), and I can vouch that none of us ever thought of him *as* a cousin.

Joan was suffering so acutely from the reaction consequent upon her recent Edinburgh gaieties, that she did not work, or even pretend to do so. She only sat idly staring at her needles, as she enlarged upon her visit to the married sister of Max; and told us how Max himself had come every day, from his chambers in the city, to take her to see some new lion; and almost every night had escorted her to the opera, or a concert, or theatre. While Joan rehearsed these dissipations of hers, and sighed over their recollection, Dorothy and Patience and I worked away all the harder, just to show we didn't care a bit about them all, in the way of being jealous. We had had our turns in Edinburgh, when Max had been pleasant and attentive to each; and though we had never had such tales of his devotion to bring back as Joan had now (and we all knew it), we would sooner die than recall the fact aloud before her. Of course we resented it a little—that was only natural—but nothing showed this, except an increased attention to our sowing and a decreased attention to Joan's narrations. I gleaned one amiable little pleasure to myself. Whenever Joan had wrought a narrative up just to the point for introducing some unusually suggestive attention from Max, I would either lose my needle and make a general and lengthy commotion, or I would turn to Patience and discuss, at great length, some sewing question of not the slightest moment

to either of us. Why should Max have chosen Joan before any one had chosen either Dorothy, or Patience, or me? She was by no means the most attractive of us. She wasn't half so sensible or domestic as Dorothy, nor half so handsome as Patience; nor half so—well, at any rate she wasn't *nicer* than me! And the whole three of us ought to have been married before Joan. There was Dorothy, our eldest, in her corner of the couch, she was eight and twenty, only nobody knew it but ourselves—not even those prying census men. Then there was Patience, sitting, as usual, very upright in her chair; she was the beauty of the family, as every one knew—as *she* knew, at any rate. And there was myself, quite on the shady side of twenty, which Joan had not reached. Why, of course we all ought to have been married before her. Yet we had now to entertain the prospect of officiating at her wedding first of all. It *was* mortifying, to say the very least of it. Yet the fact had a redeeming point, too. It was better for one to be married than none. We had been four grown-up sisters for a good many years now (the worst of Max was that he knew exactly *how* many years—cousins always know those unpleasant things!) and it was growing wearisome. Four was such an alarming number. Yes, after all, it was a thing for which to thank Providence, that Max was going to marry one of us; though certainly in my own mind Providence would have been much more heartily thanked if Max would have married me, or, next best to me, one of our elders.

"What's the matter, Barbara?" inquired Patience, suddenly; I suppose because she saw my eyebrows raised and my mouth down at the corners.

"I was thinking what a good thing it is that there is the probability of Max marrying one of us. We are such an overwhelming number. It must require superhuman courage in a man to propose to one of four marriageable sisters—he must feel like proposing to them all."

"Why is it," mused Dorothy, putting in her needle very deliberately, "that four *should* seem such an enormous number when it bears upon unmarried sisters? We shall seem even less than half as many when we are three."

"And the others go off so much more easily when one is married," I put in, consolingly. "The married one marries off one more, of course; that's her first duty. Then there are two houses to visit; and if one unmarried one stays at each; they marry directly."

"I believe," observed Patience, with meditation, "that many matches are brought about through visiting a brother-in-law."

"It often happens, too," asserted Joan, with an air of experience, "that the best man at a wedding, falls in love with——"

"The best bridesmaid. Of course that always happens. Which of us will it be?"

Patience, from her lofty pedestal, looked scornfully across at me when I made that remark. Of course she would be the best bridesmaid, as far as appearance went—she knew that; but then Patience was—well, her godfathers and godmothers at her baptism had certainly not been gifted with any remarkable prescience.

"I suppose Dorothy will be the first of us to marry. She naturally ought to be," sighed Joan, with a sentimental air of resignation, for which I could have choked her, because she evidently felt so sure of being the first herself *unnaturally*.

"No: it would be Patience first," replied Dorothy, with just as much resignation.

But Patience sighed resignedly, too, and said that under any circumstances (she didn't specify the circumstances) she should be sorry to take precedence of her elder sister. Of course it sounded very well, but I would not like to have tested her. They didn't assign me any right to be married before Joan, but if they had I should have answered with just as much self-abnegation, and should have meant it just about as much.

"It was so kind of Max to bring me home, wasn't it?" inquired Joan, naïvely, "and he was *so* careful of me on the journey."

"He certainly has the knack of making things pleasant for one," spoke Dorothy, "and making one pleased with oneself as well as with him."

"In that case the oftener one sees him the better," said I, sententiously.

"Yes," assented Patience, "I'm not sorry that he *is* coming next week."

"I suppose you are quite sure he said he was coming, eh, Joan?" inquired I; always the sceptical one of the family.

"Quite sure," returned Joan, resuming the lackadaisical pose of her head; "and quite sure that he told me, on the way home, that he had something *particular* to say to us—he didn't say to *me*, because it would have been so *very* marked."

"It is a pleasant change to have a gentleman about the house for a bit," put in Dorothy, with placidity.

"It always seemed so nice to have him about the house in Edinburgh," sighed Joan; "and he was always so indulgent to me; for ever planning some amusement for me, or some change."

"I don't think Max very nice-looking," remarked Patience, leisurely veering round, because Joan appropriated him, "though he is passable. His mouth is wide."

"But, oh! his moustache quite hides it, exclaimed Joan, with

deprecation ; "and it is such a handsome moustache, isn't it, girls ?"

"I never particularly noticed it," said Dorothy, following the lead of Patience ; "all moustaches seem the same to me—just useful to hide an ugly mouth."

"And Carew is such a good name, isn't it ?" inquired Joan again, with a pitying smile at us ; "so different from Pendie-thorpe."

"In two volumes instead of three."

That was the only retort she either elicited or deserved.

Then somebody said—and I cannot be sure who it was—that it would be well for one of us to write to tell him, and say that we should expect him by the afternoon train every day next week—I mean of course that we should expect him every day until we saw him. Then naturally the question arose—which should write.

"I suppose I ought," said Joan, complacently.

"Why so ?" asked I, with a snap. "Who so fit as Dorothy, being the eldest ?"

"Or Patience ?" proposed Dorothy ; "she writes the best hand."

Patience accepted the position under protest ; yet, after all, the task was tacitly conceded to Joan. And, then and there, I made a firm determination not to help her with a single idea for her letter, as I now regretted having done on many previous occasions.

"I should think, Joan," said I, with great *empressement*, when I had relieved my mind by this resolution, "Max cannot be coming to see you, because you have been together so lately. I wonder which of us he is coming to see—Dorothy, I expect."

Dorothy smiled at the idea ; but Patience looked unutterable discernment about whom *she* thought it more natural he should come to see.

Then, after a good while, we fell back into our first chat about Joan's wedding ; for, though we didn't quite see the fun of giving tamely up to our youngest sister the only suitor who seemed to be forthcoming, we were too fond of each other to regret the probable triumph of one ; and too fond of ourselves not to be quite aware that the marriage of one—even though that one must be the youngest—would be a benefit to all. So we discussed it all, and hid our private opinions. We chose the dresses of both bride and bridesmaids ; marked out the tour ; arranged the furnishing ; and magnanimously ceded to our eldest the first invitation from the new brother-in-law. Then we went to tea with good appetites, and to bed with easy minds.

Any day next week, might Max pop in upon us to say this particular thing ; so even Monday was not too soon to expect

him. We did not give much publicity to our special expectations; yet, though our preparations were surreptitiously conducted, I've every reason now to feel that there wasn't one of us who did not understand the practical effect of a certain unacknowledged hope in the others; but who, respecting the motive with that feeling which engenders wondrous kindness, kept the secret honourably.

Joan had brought from Edinburgh a glowing description of the little Dolly Varden aprons which had just come into fashion, and had minutely described one with pink trimmings which Max had admired. This narrative had sunk deep into my mind, and from that time I devoted all my leisure moments—in solitude and my own room—to the manufacture of a similar one. Oh! the heartburnings I suffered when steps were heard in the passage while I sat closeted there, with a lapful of ribbon-ends and loops, and an open bandbox at my feet, which was to swallow the materials *en masse* on the approach of prying eyes. But, above all things, oh! the nervousness of appearing in it first, on that Monday evening, just before the train from Edinburgh was due—for of course it would never have done to keep it *perdu* until Max had actually arrived, and then have had to appear in it, with the chance of the girls interchanging glances, and putting me out for the whole evening. I could not venture that, so I boldly put it on and went into the drawing-room, assuming an expression which was intended to be unconscious, but was really defiant in the extreme; and rapidly uttering some very irrelevant observation, for the purpose of turning every one's attention from my new and startling garment. But both the remark and the expression of countenance were alike depressing failures. I might just as well have rushed in, exclaiming, at the very top of my voice, "Look here! Look at my new apron! I made it all myself, in secret and at great expense; and for no earthly purpose but to captivate Max!" I might just as well have said it out that way in full, so plainly was it repeated in all the faces. Stupids! The more I tried to eye them down in my intense defiance, the more the six eyes glared at it. The bows grew limp under the trying scrutiny. I hopelessly felt that no such a caricature of a person had ever before rushed into their midst, armed (to no purpose) with an irrelevant observation. The apron grew, to my disordered fancy, ugly and enormous; and I could, with supreme satisfaction to myself, have pitched it on the fire. But then what a defeat that would have been; and after all Max *had* admired one just like it. If I could but live down this first ordeal, presently, perhaps, my Dolly Varden would assume its natural proportions, and my mind its natural equilibrium. I went boldly into the midst of the astonished eyes, and then I saw my opportunity and seized

it. With one *coup d'œil*, I took in the fact that Patience had made an investment too. She had at least a guinea's worth of extra plaits on her head this afternoon, for the first time; and these served beautifully as a means of removing the other four glaring eyes from my pink bows. The plaits weren't becoming to Patience, their falseness being quite evident in a side light; but I didn't mention this, in consequence of the relief they had afforded me.

"What have *you* got new, Dorothy?" I asked, growing presently courageous. "Plaits or aprons? Or have you branched out into a new line?"

"I have branched out into a new line," acquiesced Dorothy, good-humouredly, "and got *nothing*."

"I wouldn't," put in Patience, a little bit severely, "stoop to hide my investments, if I were you, Dorothy" (which was quite true, for Patience never stooped).

And we didn't say a word more, though there upon the grate stood a little drawing-room kettle, with china handle, which she had been into town that morning on purpose to buy. House-keeping always was Dorothy's weak point, and Max was known to be very keen in appreciating the convenient (as well as elegant) appliances of a meal.

Well, every day that week, at the same time, we prepared for Max; in our plaits, and pink bows, and with tea laid for five, and the glistening little kettle singing on the trivet. Certainly Joan didn't don anything new; but then she had good cause, and, besides that, made up for it in another way. She had good cause thus. She had been amply provided with everything new for her visit to Edinburgh; and, as she felt those were the very dresses which had captivated Max, what need had she for others? And she made up for it in this way. All the week she devoted herself to beautifying our garden, in anticipation of the admiration it would win from Max, when she could say, in her soft voice, and with her provokingly pretty, childish air, "*I manage the garden, Max.*" What a joke that gardening was to me—looking on—and how delighted I was to see that she expended upon it twenty times as much manual labour as had exhausted me over my Dolly Varden. Five days out of the six passed, and the preparations had, so far, been wasted; except that they had grown familiar to us now, and we bore them without uncomfortable consciousness. But on the Saturday morning, when we came down to breakfast, there lay one of Max Carew's letters on the table—unmistakeable, with its handsome crest and bold address, "*Miss Pendlethorpe.*"

"Good gracious!" I cried, with the keenest enjoyment, "it's Dorothy he means, after all."

"Don't be a goose, Barbara," reproved Patience, who had

entered the room with me, and now advanced with her stately step to look over my shoulder. "Of course, if he writes to say he is coming, he would naturally address to Dorothy, being the oldest."

"And if he is in love with her, he would naturally address to her too," I added, not quite seeing why Dorothy should be laid upon the shelf just yet.

"Come, Dorothy, don't keep us waiting," cried Joan; "I'm in an unbearable state of excitement."

But Dorothy would not hurry. I believe, in my own mind, that she preferred the suspense to the certainty. So, as we saw this, we made a great effort to hide our own eagerness, and began weakly and abortively to talk on other topics.

I never remember noticing before how desperately slow Dorothy is in opening a letter. I thought she never would have finished breaking the seal of this one; and when at last it was broken, she deliberately looked between the leaves, and turned the sheet round twice.

"Oh, the signature is there all right," remarked Patience, just a little tartly. "What comes *before* the signature?"

"Of course he only writes to say when he is coming," returned Dorothy, with indifference so supreme and unnatural that it was plain enough to see it was feigned. "I suppose you can all wait while I read it," she added, looking at us over the paper, with aggravating enjoyment.

And to prove how utterly indifferent we all were to the contents of this absurd letter, we turned entirely away, and helped ourselves to tongue and bread and butter *ad libitum*—just for two moments and a half. Then, somehow, we found our attention again concentrating itself on Dorothy, who was reading steadily now, and in utter silence. I couldn't help it—I didn't try, but I feel quite sure I couldn't have helped it if I *had* tried—I went near enough behind her, to read over her shoulder, and the first two words I saw gave me an extraordinary sensation.

My wife.

My heart bumped and thumped against my side. Which was it to be? Sure to be Joan. Yet, after all, it might be Dorothy. No; it would be Patience, of course; which of us looked anything beside Patience? Yet, why not me? I could remember hundreds of flattering and affectionate speeches Max had made to me. It was just as likely to be—

It wasn't in human power (feminine) to resist temptation any longer. While Dorothy read on, not vouchsafing us a word of explanation, we tacitly burst the bonds of polite conventionality, and—one at a time first, then altogether daringly—hovered so near that we could distinguish the words. I don't know whether Patience and Joan read it all straight through—as I did, as

whether they stopped dead at the first line—as I felt inclined to do. All I know is, that I read it through, from the ominous first line, *My—dear—Cousins*, down to the flourish after the signature, and felt not at all mollified by the performance. Dear me, couldn't he have chosen one to write to, and not swallowed up our individuality in such a distasteful gulp? Well, after saying that—*My dear Cousins*,—he said he had hoped to be able to run over to tell us his news himself, but had been unavoidably prevented. On the first of the next month he was going to marry Minnie Frere, whom Joan would recollect having met in Edinburgh; and he was sure we should give him our valued sympathy and kind and generous good wishes. His greatest desire, just then, he added, was that we would extend to his wife the delightful friendship which had always been so prized by himself. I believe there was more—lots more!—but wasn't that enough? We simultaneously attacked our breakfast, without uttering a word which related to Max; with faces set to an unnatural expression of beaming self-satisfaction, and voices tuned to joyous hilarity. I never discoursed so jocosely about an egg before in all my life; and never, either before or since, heard Patience jest so sportively with Dorothy upon the sugar requisite for her second cup of tea. Even Joan turned with a lively little start to the window now and then, and said "it was going to rain," which remark, though not strikingly original, elicited mirthful responses from all of us. It was then that I realized the eminent forbearance of my nature, for I never made even the most distant allusion to the fact that a shower would be beneficial to the seeds on which she had lately been lavishing the bulk of her property.

There was one circumstance attending the arrival of that letter which gave me unbounded satisfaction. It had *not* come by the afternoon post, to find us all expecting Max himself. My apron, with all its pink bows opened jauntily, was at any rate out of sight in my bottom drawer; and this congratulation was not even marred by the consideration that Patience reaped an equal benefit. She could never have borne her position half so well if the new guinea plait had not been—I suppose in the same sarco-phagus in which it lay undisturbed for weeks after that. Certainly Dorothy's new kettle was asserting itself conspicuously, by warbling away on the fire; but we didn't mind it so much, because, a few minutes before, in consequence of Dorothy's putting it down pettishly in the very hottest part of the fire, its china handle had cracked all across and fallen away, so that it looked decapitated enough now to take away a good deal of its sting.

So we went on through breakfast, but, as I had dismally foreseen, that jovial state of affairs could not last. Of course it was

I (it always is, they say) who made the first savage thrust; the rest followed as a natural sequence. The letter had got, by some means (nobody seemed to touch it, nobody seemed even to see it, yet it *did* crop up, first by one of us, then another), near my plate, and, in a weak and ungovernable flash of spleen, I spoke aloud the thought which it suggested to me.

"What a pity for us that Max was 'unavoidably prevented running over to tell us the news himself'! Shouldn't we have had a glorious opportunity of pouring out a libation of our 'valued sympathy and kind and generous good wishes'? Judge of our expression! Four devoted maiden cousins offering unlimited love, by proxy, to the wife we've every cause to bear malice against, and know nothing about either."

"I know her," interposed Jean, with a fragile attempt at a laugh, "but I never guessed—anything particular about her. Max was quite as—was *more* attentive to me."

"I feel a great contempt," Patience observed, turning with unusual graciousness to Joan, "for a man who behaves the same to every girl in whose society he may chance to be. His affections are not worth winning."

"They are not worth the winning—let them go," quoted I, with quite as much magnanimity as if the choice had been given me, of either retaining or letting them go, according to my fancy.

"Well, I feel relieved that he is not coming himself," spoke Dorothy, placidly. It may seem unfeeling to say it, but it is always a constraint to have a gentleman in the house to amuse."

"I wonder what the unavoidable preventive is?" said I. "I never knew him hesitate about racing over the country where he chose, letting his profession wait upon his pleasure."

"He always said it was such a treat to him to come here," said Joan, relapsing into a sigh; "he pretended it was the very most enjoyable visit he ever paid."

"Flattery!" retorted Patience. "I've no patience" (which she hadn't) "with men who pay one so much particular attention, that they make one believe things—quite against one's will, you know."

"They should be taken up for breach of promissory attentions," suggested I, airily. "We might do it—four plaintiffs at a time. Capital damages we might get."

"Max's poor wife," sighed Dorothy, with very generous, but certainly inexplicable, compassion, "will have a good deal to put up with: he is so uncertain in his mind."

"I don't think him uninformed," criticised Patience, presently, looking as if she had thoroughly understood Dorothy's term (which I must own I did not), "and he can be tolerably agreeable when he likes; but he is idle, and unfortunately plain."

"If Minnie Frere, whoever she is, knew him as well as we know him, she would evidently have refused him—as we intended to do."

I said this, thinking it just as well to put it forcibly at once, and rather struck by the coincidence that the points we were condemning in Max, were the very points we had particularly admired in him a few days ago. The thought, at any other time, would have made me laugh; but not so now—oh, not so now!

"Joan," said I, as we rose from table (for after all, the temptation proved irresistible), "you are off to the garden, I suppose, as usual? It will look very nice after a few more mornings' hard work. If you hadn't said you wished to do it all yourself, because you enjoyed it so much, I would offer to help you."

And—would you believe it?—Joan was so weak that she went. She would not venture to stop her wearisome employment suddenly, for fear of our insinuations; and so she took her leather gloves, and her mushroom, and the implements of torture, and went out to her morning's toil. When I had sufficiently enjoyed the idea and the sight, I fetched her in, knowing she would not have the courage to come of her own accord.

Then we formed another conclave, about the answer that was to be sent to Max's letter. One thing we unanimously agreed, that it should go by return; because, if we waited, Max *might* think all kinds of ridiculous and improbable things. The wonder to me now, looking back on that discussion, is, that no one of us questioned another as to what was meant by this. We all seemed to understand so well what "ridiculous and improbable things" he would be most likely to think. Yes, our letter should certainly go by return; but—who was to write it?

"Dorothy, of course," said Patience; "she's the eldest, and the news was sent to her."

"The news was sent to us all," insisted Dorothy, hastily forfeiting the honour. "Wasn't it put, *My dear cousins*?"

"But it was addressed to you," asserted Joan, quenching the remark, "and you ought to answer it."

"Joan knows him best," put in Patience, daintily satirizing the same remark made, under happier circumstances, a week before.

"Patience, you write the best hand," suggested I, on the same principle, and proud of my impunity.

But it fell to Dorothy after all, as was only natural; and she was obliged to accept the office, little as she coveted it.

"I shall write out a rough copy," she said, "and you must all help me. I don't know what to say, I'm sure."

"I should begin with 'My dear Cousin,'" I proposed, as a brilliant idea; which it was, as far as it went, though Patience said that wasn't very far.

"What else?" inquired Dorothy, looking vacantly through the

window over the back of her devenport, while we all supported her on foot.

"Perhaps after that," mused Patience, with generosity, "you had better say we are glad to hear of his approaching happiness, and hope——"

"Slowly, please," entreated Dorothy, pitcously, as her hard pen scratched along the paper; "his approaching happiness, and hope——"

"It won't last long."

"Be quiet, Barbara," pleaded Dorothy; "you put me out."

"Well, Patience,—or somebody—*and hope*——"

"His wife will accept our friendship, when——"

"We offer it, which won't be yet."

"Go on, Dorothy. Don't get into a fidget. Never mind Barbara. Now, *We are very sorry you could not come over to tell us the news yourself.*"

"Oh! the egregiousness of that fib! It should stand alone. Make a postscript of it."

"You had better say I remember his wife very well," said Joan, with self-abnegation, "and admire her, but regret——"

"He should have chosen her."

"I suppose you must tell him," resumed Patience, "that the valued sympathy and kind and generous good wishes he bespeaks, are his, if they are——"

"Anybody's, as they certainly aren't ours."

"And that we hope soon to make the acquaintance of——"

"Somebody with more sense."

"The acquaintance of—acquaintance of—of—What are we to call her this time, girls?" We won't say wife again, because she isn't his wife yet."

"Let's say—acquaintance of the person who isn't your wife yet, and may never be."

"Oh! how you confuse one, Barbara!" moaned Dorothy.

"What is to come after *acquaintance of your*——"

"Why not put—*your choice*?" suggested Joan, who always had a turn for romantic terms in letters.

"Wife will do," remarked Patience, curtly; "I daresay the word won't come a bit too often to please him now. Go on, and that when we do, we——"

"Will tell her what we think of her."

"Say," dictated Patience, with an annihilating glance across at me, "*We hope she will come with you to stay a little in our quiet old—* what?—home sounds sentimental?"

"Affections *ad libitum* offered her on her arrival. Put that in, Dorothy."

"Place will do," decided Dorothy, hastening hopefully on, now that the end seemed near. "What's the conclusion to be?"

"Be sure to put, *We are, my dear Cousin, your dear cousins—*"

"Don't be stupid, Barbara," reproved Patience. "Finish it up like an ordinary letter, Dorothy."

"But it isn't an ordinary letter," I maintained, "and has taken more than ordinary pains to write, and it ought not to have an ordinary ending. Sign all our names in a procession, single file. Oh! won't he congratulate himself, when he sees them, that he didn't form any unfortunate attachment among them! What an alliance."

Dorothy Pendlethorpe.

Patience Pendlethorpe.

Barbara Pendlethorpe.

Joan Pendlethorpe."

"I should say sign it *D. Pendlethorpe and Co.,*" suggested Joan, with praiseworthy vivacity. "At any rate, it won't sound old-maidish."

But Dorothy was not to be lured into the straggling paths of originality, and it is impossible to conceive anything more ordinary than the conclusion she selected from the recesses of her own brain.

"Now, Dorothy, read it over to us," was the unanimous invitation, "and make haste. Why should we spend the whole morning over it?"

But Dorothy only pored the closer over her scrawling words and muttered faintly that there was a mistake somewhere. As if we hadn't known that all the morning!

"It's no wonder that I have been blundering," fretted our poor eldest. "You were all bent on confusing me. I can see how it has occurred."

"Don't stop to correct it," cried I, capturing it before she had begun; "if we don't hear it as it is, how are we to propose amendments? I'll read it out. Here goes."

"*My dear cousin.* That's my bit, and very telling, I think."

"What does it tell?" inquired Patience, with a chill.

"*My dear cousin, we are glad to hear of his approaching—*"

"Of *your* approaching," corrected Patience, recognising her own idea.

"*Happiness, and hope it won't last—*There's a sort of dash there as if an error had been detected and nipped in the bud.—*And hope his wife will accept our friendship when we offer it, which won't be yet. We were very sorry you could not come over and tell us your news yourself. Oh! the e-gre!*—another dash there. *Joan says she remembers your wife very well, and admires her, but regrets he should have chosen her—*dash again. *The valued sympathy and kind and generous good wishes you bespeak are yours, if they are anybody's, as they aren't ours, and that we hope soon to make the acquaintance of somebody with more—of your choice wife*

And that when we do we will tell her. And we hope she will come with you soon to stay in our quiet old affections. That's all. You certainly had no right to call *this* an ordinary letter, Patience. Cheer up, Dorothy; there is material here for a fine composition. Try again, and we won't bother."

The plan succeeded better than could have been expected, for Dorothy didn't leave her place at the deavenport again until the letter was written. She pretended not to want to read this second effort aloud to us, but looked suspiciously pleased when we declined to take any refusal, and she read it with a self-appreciation which was deliciously unctuous. Really, it read very well, too. Yet, to watch it folded and sealed, seemed a bit dismal too; and I'm sure I had detected a wrinkle on Dorothy's forehead while she had been reading, which had never been there before.

But now that the letter was composed and indited, what was to be done with it? This was a question of moment—of a good many moments.

"If we give it to one of the servants to post, *everybody* will be talking," remarked Patience, impressively.

"*Everybody*," I assented, wondering a little, though, why we had never thought of this with regard to those previous frequent letters; but of course a thought takes a long while to mature if it is a good thought.

"One of *us* must go," decided Dorothy; "you may as well, Joan."

But Joan did not catch with any eagerness at the proposal—had indeed a strong objection to it.

Well, at last we made the only arrangement which we could amicably make. This was for all of us to go together *for a walk*. Briskly we impressed that fact upon each other. Hadn't we always intended to take a walk together this morning, and in the very direction of the post-office? Under those circumstances, what so natural as to take the letter with us, and drop it in as we passed?

"At any rate," mused Dorothy, a feeble joy struggling into her face, "we shall not be called upon to write again to Max very soon."

"We should only get unpleasantly commented on if we did," added Joan, plaintively.

"But in future, you see," suggested I, as a lively palliative, "we should be able to address our letters to his wife. *There's* a comfort. Now then, let us start, as we *are* to go, all of us in a crowd."

"How contemptuously you speak, Barbara," said Dorothy, in a tone of mild reproach.

"Well, aren't we a crowd?" I asked, "and, more than that, aren't we a crowd without a solitary prospect left among us?"

"I cannot help wishing we were not quite so many," mused Joan; "I wish Max *had* cared for one of us. Three is, after all, quite a usual number; but four——"

"Four is terrific!" struck in Dorothy, with extraordinary energy.

"Four!" I echoed. "Four is nothing, but I feel to-day as if we were *forty* at least. We look forty walking two and two in the street. We look forty here, all crowded in the room. We always *shall* look forty of us now—all totally, hopelessly, irretrievably unmarriageable."

And then it happened. I'm sure I don't know exactly how, or why, or who began it; but it happened. I affirm that the first twinkle was in Dorothy's eye. Joan has told me since that the first was in mine. Dorothy asserts that she saw the first in Patience's. And Patience never can be convinced that she didn't catch the first in Joan's.

Perhaps we were every one of us right, too. At any rate the fact stands. The twinkle in somebody's eye, brought a twinkle into somebody else's; and in about half a minute we were all **in the very middle of a long, hearty, irrepressible laugh.**

HE STOOPS TO CONQUER.

It is not usual for the quick, dark eyes of Sir Victor Luhorne to wear the puzzled expression they are wearing now ; still less usual is it for the old baronet to be harbouring in his mind a restless and uncomfortable doubt regarding his own wisdom and foresight. True, the doubt is but a vague one, yet it oppresses him none the less heavily and disagreeably, for all that.

"You seem slower than usual, Foster. Do the contractions puzzle you?"

"Very much they puzzle me to-night, sir ; but I shall manage to decipher them in time."

The face the young man bends above the written page is a face which any one might like to look upon ; yet Sir Victor turns his eyes from it hurriedly, and walks down the room.

This young copyist of his has become strangely useful to him ; almost necessary, as it seems ; and yet he feels it would have been better for him to have been alone here, now that his daughter is coming home—his only daughter and heiress. Doubly this thought oppresses him when he remembers how, in another year, she is to be mistress of the splendid home which had been his father's. True, it was he himself who won the baronetcy, in that long time of war through which his head and hand had done so much in England's service ; but his elder brother's son must inherit it from him, just as he inherited from his father, the grand old abbey which even yet Sir Victor likes to speak of as *home*.

The quiet, handsome face of the young man has not again been raised from his copying, when a carriage rolls past the unshuttered window ; and when it stops, a girl springs from it, in the silvery moonlight ; and laughs out her joy at being home, with such bright music as the old house has not echoed since this girl left it, eight years before.

"My first glimpse was the brightest and best of all, papa," she says, as she enters the library, with her hands clasped round her father's arm. "I saw the dear old room through the uncurtained window—as of course you meant me to do. I saw every-

thing look exactly as it has looked in my happiest dreams. I saw you at the window watching for me, and I fancied——”

“Clare, this is my secretary, Mr. Foster. Foster, Miss Lulhorne.”

The young man bows, but Sir Victor's daughter offers him her hand, with a certain grave and simple courtesy which is natural to her, and in no part the result of her foreign education. She has detected, from her father's introduction, that this gentleman is a dependent in the house; and, as such, Clare Lulhorne recognises instinctively the claim he has upon her courtesy.

This evening at *The Reveries* is one to be remembered through a whole life. For the father, because he has his daughter back with him once more; for the child, because she is home again. And for Allan Foster too, although, as soon as his absence is allowable, he leaves the father and daughter together in their happy reunion, and returns to his work. He has scarcely glanced at Clare, through the lingering dinner; has scarcely once addressed her; and now she watches his receding figure, with her brows drawn a little.

“Is he copying your MS., papa—the great book on the war? Sometimes I have been vain enough to fancy you might give me that task. Father, dear, can he bestow as much care upon it as I would have done?”

She is sitting close beside him, and he bends to kiss her, with an infinite tenderness.

“Never mind him, pet. He will only be here until his task is finished. He can receive only courtesy and attention in this house; and beyond that he looks for nothing but quiet.”

Clare wonders a little at her father's quick, decided words; wonders whether he fears, or fancies, that her coming will hinder this work on which for years his heart has been set.

“I wish you *could* have done the copying for me, dear,” he adds, with a change of tone that is almost pathetic in its earnestness. “It would have spared me doubt and harass; but it would have taken me a year at least to teach a child like you to read my short-hand.”

“And can Mr. Foster do it without any teaching at all?”

“Of course not, of course not,” the baronet answers, almost sharply; “but men are quicker at that sort of thing than women are.”

“And more patient, papa?”

He glances at her with swift scrutiny. Has she guessed already at Foster's patience, or his skill? And then she goes, and he paces to and fro, muttering to himself in his vexation:

“Why has he made himself so necessary to me that I dread the thought of losing him? I wish he were gone! It would be safer, far safer. A young, romantic girl, with all her mother's

proud indifference to wealth, and all her father's admiration of intellect. But she is a good child," adds Sir Victor, soothingly to himself, as he re-enters the library, where the young secretary sits engrossed in his copying, "a good, obedient child, and Victor will be here soon. Besides that, she knows full well what is due from a daughter of mine, and the future Lady Luhorne."

"Foster," he says aloud, as he takes his own chair at the fire, "just write a letter for me, will you, to Victor Luhorne, Esq., Chine Abbey, Cheshire? Say I believe this to be the time he fixed for his return to England, and therefore we are expecting him on his promised visit here. Remind him that I have not seen him since he was a boy, and say my daughter has returned from Italy, and I think it high time we should renew the intercourse which has for long been personally suspended."

"Is that all, sir? I have written it."

The baronet's eyes are upon the fire, still, but his voice catches a little of the pleasant brightness of the voice which questions him.

"That is all. Mr. Luhorne will understand the rest. He will need no hastening when he hears that my daughter has returned. But he may not be in England yet, so write on the outside, 'Not to be forwarded.' There is no occasion for the letter to be sent from England, but I fancy he will be home now. I hope so. For the last two years he has been in Africa, exploring; a wild chimera *that* was; but as he has wealth, and leisure, and energy, he may as well indulge his hobby—while he is free."

No question yet.

"But why should he question me?" the baronet argues with himself. "What is it all to him, that he should afford me the opportunity of telling him our private affairs? Still, they had better be told."

"You have grown to be so thoroughly a part of my household, Foster," he continues, looking kindly, if keenly, into the young man's face, "that I may tell you what is yet only known to ourselves. For many years there has been an engagement between my nephew—a young man still, though now the head of our house—and my daughter; and it is to be ratified as soon as she is eighteen, when, according to the terms of my will, she comes of age. By this union, you see, the old estate which has belonged to our family for five hundred years will revert, as it were, to my branch, without departing from its lawful inheritor; and my daughter will share the title I won, and of which I am so proud."

No answer. Foster is leisurely sealing his letter, gazing indifferently down upon the Luhorne arms emblazoned in vermilion on the envelope.

"Foster, when may I promise my manuscript? Can it be completed by—at any rate the end of May?"

"Hardly, Sir Victor. I cannot promise any greater progress than I am making now as I devote all my time to it. It would be safer for you to say the end of June."

"Very well. Of course I shall be glad when it is finished, though I shall miss you from your post there."

The baronet says this with an effort, perhaps because he is trying to think the wish a matter of duty, perhaps because he is trying to think the matter of duty his wish.

"What do you think to do after you leave The Roveries?"

"I intend to try for similar employment elsewhere, Sir Victor; but I do not need to think of it until the time comes."

"Remember always, Foster," says the baronet, meeting almost wistfully the grave, handsome eyes, which he has grown so strangely fond of meeting in his solitary rooms, "that whatever writing I have, which you *can* do for me, I shall like you to do; especially when—when my daughter has left me again in solitude."

The young man thanks him with a quietness which has a touch of pride in it, then continues his writing, and Sir Victor says no more.

• • • • •

Clare is out among her flowers, singing to herself in the brightness of the morning sunshine. She has a half-blown *gloire de Dijon* ready for her father's buttonhole, and now she wants only a spray of jasmine to complete a dainty bouquet for the breakfast-table.

"Clare, come in, pet. Breakfast is waiting, and so am I. Besides, I have a letter to show you."

She comes in through the window, and puts her basket down upon a chair, then she fastens the rose in her father's coat.

"I have plenty of time, papa. See, Mr. Foster is not down yet, and he is never late."

"Not down! Why, he breakfasted an hour ago, pet. He is working away now, as if he had never left his desk since last night."

Clare's head droops a little lower over the rose. Her fingers are less deft than usual; but Sir Victor is patient enough; for he likes to have her there so close beside him.

"You don't ask for the letter, dear. Here it is."

"Tell me of it, papa. It will be better than reading it."

As she speaks, Clare takes her place at the table; leaving the flowers upon the chair—those chosen flowers which were to have brightened and beautified this meal.

"No, you must read it; for a more satisfactory letter Victor could not have written. He is in England now, and hopes to

see us in a few days' time. He says so much of you, pet, that the least you can do will be to read his loving words."

Because her father holds the letter towards her, Clare takes it.

"Any day he may be here now," Sir Victor says, as he sits opposite his daughter, heedless of the vacant place between them. "I wish my book were finished, though it must be no drawback to Victor's pleasure. If he has your society, he will not object to losing mine occasionally."

Clare is bending over her cousin's letter, yet all she clearly sees there, even now, is her own name repeated again and again, and the one at the close, "Victor Luhorne." For all the seventeen years of her life, these two words have been good for her to hear or see—until now.

"The change will be pleasant for you, pet," her father adds, "and do you good. You have been too long alone here with two such studious fogies as Foster and me."

The bright pink rises slowly and shyly in the girl's cheeks. She leans a little lower over the open page; but there grows no meaning in the words even yet.

"Victor cannot, at any rate, arrive this morning," continues the baronet, "so we need not give up our ride. I am anxious not to delay my investigations at the quarries. It would disappoint Foster, too, who so seldom allows himself an hour's holiday. May I tell him you will look in and summon him when you are ready? That will prevent his wasting any time."

Clare's wistful eyes follow her father as he leaves the room, then wander on, beyond the open window, out among the sunlit leaves. But the brightness there is not what it was before she saw that letter, on which her hands are idly lying now, and hiding the loving, confident words.

Her morning tasks are over, and in her habit and hat she enters the shadowy library, to summon Mr. Foster.

"Please to come now, Mr. Foster. We are ready."

He is standing at the table, sorting the pages he has already written, and he only glances up for an instant as he answers her.

"I am not going, thank you, Miss Luhorne."

Her eyes are grave in their questioning, though his do not meet them.

"Why is this? Do not say again that you cannot spare the time. Surely the old reason is not potent to-day?"

"The old reason is doubly potent to-day, Miss Luhorne. I will take no more leisure until my work is finished."

"Do you mean?"—the girl's face is whiter than usual, but a restless light burns in her eyes—"that you think we want this work over which—which keeps you with us, Mr. Foster, because my cousin is coming?"

He is standing very still beside the table now. She can see a little of the stern, strong effort he is making to be calm.

"Yes, I do think so. Sir Victor is very anxious to be at liberty, and you yourself will feel the relief of my absence."

"Never," she cries, while her right hand goes out to meet his, almost wistfully. "The house will seem quite changed when you are gone. There is a kind of—of rest, in the very thought that you are here."

"But it is all unrest and misery for me."

The hand she has offered him is clasped in his—close and tight—just for one moment, as the words rush from his lips; but, almost before she has comprehended them, he has turned away, that she may not read upon his face what it would be treachery in him to tell her.

"Now, Clare," calls Sir Victor's voice from the hall, "come, dear. Foster pleads business, so we must go alone, after all."

Clare leaves the room, with a burning blush upon her cheeks.

It is not quite two months since she came home, so full of dazzling hopes; and now they have all merged in a quiet hopelessness which is like pain.

Through the long ride, her thoughts go back over those two months; and even Sir Victor, through all his conversation with his daughter, finds his thoughts wandering backward, too, over the short span of time through which he has had his darling with him. He recalls that doubt which had harassed him uncomfortably at first; and, now that he knows Victor is coming, he is surprised that it had ever power to hurt him. He recalls how, from the very first, Foster had kept aloof from his daughter; perhaps in consequence of what had been told him; perhaps in the fear of trusting himself; perhaps only from being engrossed in his work. He recalls how, at first, there had been no avoidance visible in Clare's manner; on the contrary, in her own happiness she had done all she could to make her home a home to the young man, who never had been allowed to feel himself a stranger among them. But he recalls, too, that after a while a change came in her behaviour to Allan Foster. Sometimes she took the old ready and sincere interest in his work, loitering with him over it, and even joining him in it; but at others she shunned the library, only entering it under the shelter of her father's presence, and then sitting quite still, while the father, at such times, could hardly recognise his happy, radiant child. But, while he had remarked all this, the baronet fancied he had understood the reason of his daughter's wayward, changeable moods. Victor's coming would, naturally now, be much in her thoughts, and would make her grave and reticent at times.

So the two months have passed; and the cousin, to whom Clare is betrothed, can never recall them.

Sir Victor sits alone in his library, but the shaded lamp sheds little light except upon the desk before the secretary's empty chair. Sir Victor has been reading over the latest written pages, but now he has turned to the fire, and fallen into deep thought. Another letter from his nephew has fixed his arrival at The Roveries definitely for two weeks hence. By that time Sir Victor rejoices to think, the book will be finished, and he and Clare will be alone to welcome Victor. If Clare would only show a little more real gladness in the anticipation of his coming! If she would only look a little more like she looked on the night when she first came home!

"Father, father dear, let me sit here—with you."

It is the voice which has been recalling itself sadly to him in his solitude; and the face that leans against his shoulder is the face whose memory has been paining him.

"Dear," he answers, stroking her hair with wonderful tenderness, "where should you be so welcome as here with me? Shall I take the shade from Foster's lamp?"

"Don't mind, papa,"—the pleading hands are clasped about his arm, the pleading eyes are raised to his—"I like the dusk. I want to talk to you a little, and we always liked talking in the firelight, didn't we? Papa, when will the book be ready?"

"Why, my dear, you don't mean to say that you need the lamp shaded to ask *that*?"

The father's words are light enough, but his heart begins to fail him a little, while he listens to the struggle in his child's voice, and sees the longing in her eyes.

"It will be finished by the day Victor comes. Rest content with that, my pet."

"And Victor comes—in two weeks' time?"

"In two weeks' time exactly. It will soon pass, pet; don't be impatient."

"Father, wasn't it Victor himself who asked you to engage Mr. Foster?"

"Yes, dear; and very much indebted I am to him; though I shall be thoroughly glad when Foster has finished, and gone from here."

For one moment Clare's breath comes with a quick, sharp pain.

"Father," she whispers, "will you come away for those two weeks—away from here—you and I *only*?"

"My dear," he answers, in quick wonderment, "the thing is impossible. Don't you see that, if I *could* leave Foster alone at his work, I should not be so anxious for him to finish before Victor's arrival?"

"Then, papa, will you take *me* away and leave me, and—and only fetch me home when Victor is come—is really here?"

Sir Victor raises the white face, and gazes steadfastly down into the feverish eyes. But his words are grave to sternness.

"My child, can you have been, even for one hour, untrue to yourself—untrue to me—untrue to Victor?"

The girl's brave, gentle answer is but half uttered, when the door is opened, and Sir Victor's secretary walks quietly towards his desk.

"No more writing to-night, Foster," the baronet says, in an unusual tone of quick authority. "But stay a moment. As you are here, I may as well tell you of my present arrangements. To-morrow morning Miss Luhrne and I leave the Roveries for a—for—for a few weeks. You have engaged to have your copying completed in fourteen days, and I hope you will not fail in that engagement, though I shall not be here to refer to. I must leave it all to you; but you are so correct and careful, that I have no hesitation in doing so. I am sorry to—to be called away so suddenly, Foster; doubly sorry, because—" Sir Victor breaks off here, and finishes his speech with a change of tone—"I will write to you, and I may possibly return before you leave. But my daughter will bid you good-bye to-night—now."

Clare rises and moves towards him—slowly, as if awaking from a dream whose influence lingers round her still. Her hand is held towards him, but, unheeding it, he turns aside and addresses Sir Victor.

"I cannot bid her good-bye without telling her, in your presence, Sir Victor, how much I thank her for trying to make my life happy here. If her beauty and goodness have worked me misery instead of happiness, her will has had nothing to do with it, and I would now thank her from my heart—now while your presence keeps me beyond the circle of your hearth, and shelters her within it from the need of answering my vain and arrogant words. I must thank her, and tell her it is well that we should part—because my heart is breaking in its love for her."

"Are you mad? Do you forget to whom you speak?"

The old baronet's voice is harshly querulous, and one of his white and shaking hands lies on his daughter's shoulder with a heavy pressure. Allan thinks that, in his tremulous anger, the old man needs the support. Clare thinks it is to keep her back.

"No, I do not forget," the young man answers slowly, while his eyes, intent and questioning, seek Clare's for the first time. "If I *could* have forgotten, I might have told her this at a time when you were not present to remind her whose daughter she is, and whose betrothed. No, I do not forget, though I have dared to tell her the pitiful story of my love."

His eyes are bright and eager now—so dauntless that Sir Victor is a little bewildered as he meets them.

"Go, my dear." Sir Victor speaks low and swiftly in his intense, curbed excitement, and takes his hand quickly from his child's shoulder. "Why lengthen this scene? Go at once, and leave us."

"Father," she whispers—and her caressing fingers go up and lock themselves about his neck, while her beseeching eyes seek his with a new light of happiness within their depths—"father, I cannot say good-bye to him now. Oh! father, have pity! Tell him to stay—tell him I love him. Tell him to stay, for *my* sake!"

The father's rage is terrible to see or hear—all the more terrible from the fierce control he puts upon himself.

"Hush, Sir Victor," interrupts the young man quietly, as he turns his eyes from the girl's pained and frightened face. "These words are surely needless. You have nothing to fear from my *treachery*, as you call it. Let me only ask one question of Miss Luhorne, and I will anger you by no other word to-night. I shall go away without seeing her again, and I will never think of her but as Mr. Luhorne's wife, if—if she tells me that she will be so."

"Never—never!" she answers, shrinking a little from her father as she speaks. "I never can be Victor's wife now that—I have known you. Father, don't look so angry; don't turn from me. Why cannot we be happy—we three—as we have been? Oh! father, listen to this one prayer. I am your only child."

"My *only* child, as you truly say," repeats the baronet, with stern, cold emphasis. "It is hard for a man's wish and will to be scorned and thwarted by his only child. Leave us, Clare, or your want of love and gratitude may wring from me words which can never be forgotten."

She interrupts him to plead that Victor knew she had not voluntarily entered into any engagement with him, and that he would release her; but, unheeding these words, the baronet turns to his secretary, and dismisses him in proud, ungovernable anger; pointing to the door as he utters slowly the last words he is to speak to Allan Foster.

"One thing I would have you remember. If you succeed in tempting my daughter to forget her duty to me and to my nephew, I shall at once, and without scruple, disinherit and disown her. Unless you had treacherously set yourself to entrap a rich man's heiress, you would hardly have thought of a wife at all, except as an encumbrance to you in your present career."

The young man's face is white as death, but no words fall from his lips. With a little sob of pain, which checks her utterance at first, Clare asks him if this is true.

"If only I could know you poor and free," he answers,—"*in my selfishness I say it—if only I had the right to show you my*

love, you should understand it, as I can never try or hope to make you understand it now."

"Then, Allan" (how sad, in all its earnestness, is the low voice that makes the promise!) "I will be your wife. My father is willing to give me in marriage elsewhere, so it is not that he cannot spare me. That marriage can never be now; and—and if, on my birthday, you love me still as you love me to-night, come back for me; I will be ready then."

There is a quiet handshake between them; then Sir Victor addresses his daughter.

"You will decide as you choose, of course, but my decision, made to-night, will never change. On the day when you deliberately tell me it is your intention to be Foster's wife, your name shall be taken from my will. No daughter of mine shall belong to a man who has acted with such cowardly deceit and treachery. Fool that I was to bring him here! fool that Victor was to send him!"

Foster has left the room now, and the father and daughter are alone.

"Papa," she pleads, with wide, frightened eyes, "take back that vow. *Could* you send me from you for ever because I choose him before Victor? I do not even remember Victor, so how can I love him? Why not give me to the one I love? And I should be near you, father; and—and you like him—you have often told me so. You never can send me away—me, your only child! Take back that one vow, father; never mind the other. Let everything go to Victor, if I may only keep your love."

But the cry is only answered by a wrathful repetition of the vow, and Clare sinks down and hides her face, as the words are uttered.

It is the day before Clare's birthday, and while the carriage is at the station, waiting for the family solicitor, Sir Victor speaks to his daughter for the first time, on that subject which has never been mentioned by either since Allan Foster left The Roveries.

"Before Burton comes," he says, "I will give you another chance of telling me that your mind is changed, Clare."

"My heart is not changed, father; it can never change."

"Then if you go to him to-morrow" (the baronet's words are slow and bitter beyond telling), "you go a penniless girl. Do you ever imagine what a burden you will feel yourself upon him, and how soon you will begin to repent most bitterly the day you left your old luxurious life? Do you ever imagine how you will fret and chafe and repine in such a home as *he* can give you?"

"I have tried to think of everything, father. I think Allan works so hard that we need not be very poor. He never has written, but I *believe* he will come to-morrow."

Sir Victor turns his scornful face away.

"He will drag you down to penury, then work on my weak love for you, to induce me to rescue you and help him. But it will be useless. Now make your decision, Clare. After to-day it will be too late."

"I could never decide to be false to Allan. Oh! father, let me send for him here. Let him just once plead with you himself. You *used* to listen to him. How can our happy life together—yours and mine—be broken suddenly and miserably, as you have said it shall?"

For a moment there flashes into his mind, the dread of what his life must be without her, now that this year of close companionship has knit their hearts together in so firm and true a love. But pride is stronger than such memories, and he has not turned when Mr. Burton is announced.

For the whole afternoon Sir Victor and his lawyer are closeted together, then Clare meets them at dinner. It is a silent meal, yet when it is over she leaves the room unwillingly. She is sitting listlessly before the fire, when the old lawyer enters. He has known her from her birth, and Clare listens, almost as she would listen to her father, when he begins to speak to her, with an unusual gravity on his kind, keen face.

"Your father tells me, Miss Luhorne, that you are aware of the change which I have been summoned here to-day to make in his will."

"Yes."

"Can you assure me that you really understand Sir Victor's present will, drawn up and signed and witnessed, legal in every way? All the property, which should be yours, is bequeathed to your cousin, Victor Luhorne, of Chine Abbey. Do you know this, and that you are left literally without a penny of your father's wealth?"

"I know," she answers, quietly, "I know it is to go from me."

"But why should it go from you? Are you not sorry already?"

"I am very sorry," she answers, slowly, "very, very sorry; but I cannot change."

"Think again, Miss Clare," he says, watching her intently. "Let me put the case before you in its practical aspect. I can show you the flimsiness of your own infatuation, and it is not too late to change, even now."

"It is too late for me to change," she answers simply. "I have had a whole year to think one thought, and it is too firm a one to be shaken now."

"At any rate, I shall wait over to-morrow, to see. You will surely be more reasonable when you have come of age. Think over it all, Miss Clare. Picture your father's disappointment in the failure of his pleasant plans for you and Mr. Luhorne. Where is he, by-the-way?"

"He is abroad again. I wrote to him at once, when Mr. Foster went from here, and told him—everything. In his reply he said he should go abroad again at once."

"Is he returning soon?"

"I think so. I know papa hopes so."

"And so do I. Now I am going to have a smoke, Miss Clare. Sir Victor has gone to his room. He seems tired and harassed—and no wonder. Good night, my dear. In the morning I shall have the pleasure of hearing quite a different decision from your lips."

He speaks with cheery confidence, but in his heart he knows that the girl's choice will never be other than it is to-night.

Sir Victor's room is all in darkness when Clare softly enters it, carrying no light. He cannot see her face as she kneels beside the bed, but he can guess her anguish, when he hears her broken and beseeching words.

"Father, this is the last night, and it is so miserable for me. Can you really say that you will never see or speak to me again if I marry Allan? Won't you call back those cruel words, father? How *can* you banish me? Think what we have been to each other—we two—only we two—bound by such a holy tie. Can you break a link which God himself has made? What is Victor, that he should come between and separate us? Could a cousin have parted you and my mother years ago? Think of your love for her. And, father—in pity to me—think of *her* love for *you*."

"The cases are different," Sir Victor answers, icily. "Do not name them together. Not one of your race has acted as you are acting now. Never speak to me again, Clare, until you have resolved to obey me."

Alone again in darkness, after his child has left him, Sir Victor repeats to himself again and again, that the morrow will make all right. "Even though Foster comes," he adds in a whisper to himself. "Even though he comes; and he may not come, for he has not written."

But in the morning Clare is gone. No wedding chime is pealing from the church across the park, but Sir Victor knows that his daughter is married to Allan Foster that day.

Sir Victor sits unoccupied in his lonely library. The unfinished MS. lies on the table, but the old baronet avoids now the very sight of what for so long has been his pride and pleasure. He does not venture to acknowledge, even to himself, how sorely he

misses his child's voice and step about the house, which has grown so desolate now, though only two days have passed since she left it. Sir Victor takes an open letter from the table near him, and reads it for the second time, with a little gleam of pleasure in his stern, worn face. It is from his nephew, who is settled at home in England at last, and writes to ask Sir Victor to go and see him, because he is forcibly kept at home at present. "I am not very ill," he writes, "but still not able to leave home. Do come, Uncle Victor. Indeed, I shall so thoroughly depend upon you, that I shall send to meet every train, from the first one you could take, to the one which brings you."

"I will go," the baronet decides, with a tired sigh. "Victor has a double claim to all courtesy from us—from me, I mean. He is a noble fellow, and I can never forget how we have treated him."

Listlessly Sir Victor takes up another letter, unconsciously, the while, comparing the two handwritings—as Clare had done one morning in the past Summer—the regular-well-formed characters in the one; the scrawled words in the other. This letter, which he also reads a second time, is but a simple request from his old secretary to be allowed to finish, at his own house, the copying he had so nearly completed. Leisurely Sir Victor drops this letter down among the glowing coals; but the memories it has awakened cannot be burned to ashes so. He finds himself contrasting Victor's beautiful home in Cheshire, with the cottage where he fancies Foster has made a home for his child. Has she power to make that mean home bright and beautiful, as she used to make this one, which seems so empty and so desolate now? Does she make Foster's life now, all that *his* used to be?

Again, in his effort to dispel these haunting thoughts, the baronet brings forth the will which he had dictated on the day before Clare's birthday. He will read it once through to-night. He has only read half through it, when his tremulous hands fall wearily upon the words, because, while he reads them, they pierce him with an incomprehensible pain. Yet he cannot alter his will; for had he not said he would leave his child penniless if she married Foster, and did she not do so knowing this? *Could* any alteration be made? Could he leave his wealth to Clare's child? Ah, to think of little Clare a mother! A mother struggling against poverty, just as gently and as bravely as she struggled against her misplaced love. No; he dare not picture that. Could he leave his wealth to Clare's husband? It would be countenancing his treachery; yet—he *was* Clare's husband; the husband who loved her; the husband in whose hands would lie Clare's own happiness for all her life. Only a few words need be altered; and—he had made no vow to leave his wealth away from Clare's husband

"It is weak and childish," sighs Sir Victor to himself, half an hour afterwards, as he refolds the will; "but I am an old man, and cannot see things clearly as I used to do. A little time has aged me sadly. I—I will do it—after I have seen Victor. Of course I will see Victor first. It will do me good to see him. These days alone here have been long and heavy for me. The rooms get larger and emptier, and more silent, every day—and I get older. Still, it shall go—to Clare's husband."

Sir Victor leans forward eagerly, as the carriage rolls up the park to Chine Abbey. His eyes are wistful as a girl's, when they wander over the sunny landscape and wait for the first glimpse of his home of long ago; and when the old Abbey comes suddenly in sight, his breath quickens, his heart flutters, and the fingers of his right hand close upon the carriage door with a spasm of pain.

This is the home which he loves better than any spot on earth; and this is the home which might have been Clare's. Here he had hoped to die, with his grandchildren about him, and his child's hand in his. Tears are but rare visitants to such eyes as his, but they stand thick upon his drooping lids, when he enters his old home.

He stands at one of the windows, in the April sunshine, waiting for Victor. He looks out yearningly; seeing and thinking nothing of the beautiful, pleasant homeliness of the room itself, because he can see the river on which he and Victor's father used to row as boys. He can see the very oak under which Clare's mother sat on that morning when she promised to be his wife. He can see the boat in which he took his baby Clare for her first row. He can see—nothing more; for the tears blind him now, and his white head is bent to hide them.

"Father?"

The old forms have been so life-like to him—there on the old spot—that he can fancy it is really his little daughter's own voice whispering the word.

"Father—dearest."

Ah, kind heaven! It *is* Clare's own voice. It is Clare herself who comes towards him, in her own radiant beauty, and in the beauty of the sunshine which has always belonged to her. Her lips are raised to his, her eyes are beautiful exceedingly, in their glad and steadfast love.

"Father, speak to me! Oh, my dear, speak to me. There is no oath to keep you silent, for I did *not* marry Allan Foster."

"Clare! Clare! What is it? Tell me what you mean. I am old, and cannot bear another separation."

"Never, father, never. No other separation can ever come. We are together again for *always*. Father"—her arms are locked

about his neck ; and, between the whispered words, she presses her laughing, happy lips to his. "Father—I—married—Victor."

The simple meaning of the few words has not reached him, when Clare's husband stands before him ; a gallant, handsome English gentleman, with a happy laughter in his eyes.

"Foster ! Why are you here ? Clare, what does it mean ? Tell me how it is, Foster. I am dull and bewildered ; nothing is clear, except——"

"Except, papa," Clare softly laughs, as she nestles still closer in his arms, "that we are all together again, you—and I—and Victor."

"But Foster——"

"Don't call me Foster any more, please, uncle," the young man puts in, pleasantly, "unless you forgive me more easily by that name. Can you ever do so ?"

One close grasp the baronet gives the outstretched hand, but no words yet will pass his shaking lips.

"I don't know what to do, uncle, really," Victor adds, laying one hand tenderly upon Clare's head. "I cannot thank you for giving me my wife, because you declined to do it ; yet I ought to thank you, because you wished to do it, and had promised."

"But why," falters Sir Victor at last, "why did you never tell me ?"

"Ah, that would have undone it all, though I know I can never have sufficient excuse for causing you *any* pain and loneliness. We can only try now to make up for it, and tempt you to forget it. After all, uncle, it was almost a *natural* wish of mine, wasn't it ? to try to win my own wife as other men do, and not expect her to come passively to me because she had been promised to me as a child, without her own wishes being consulted. I felt that she would come in obedience to you, and I wanted *love* to bring her—love that should prove to be even stronger than obedience ; love that should brave everything. It was very hard to continue in the deceit, Uncle Victor, but without it, I should never have known the intense happiness which is mine now. You *will* forgive me ? It seemed so hard not to have to take my chance like other men, that I—I was happy to take even a *less* chance than most other men."

"I might have guessed it," says Sir Victor, his eyes full indeed as he looks from his daughter to her husband, "knowing your nature, Victor."

"And my right to indulge my hobbies while I was free—as you told poor Foster on the night Clare came home."

"Don't remind me of it—quite yet. Clare, did *you* know who Allan Foster was ?"

"Never," she answers, suddenly grave and earnest, "never until we were in church together—on my birthday morning

Think what a surprise it was to me, and what trouble we had to keep it still a secret. Why, father, *I* could not have kept the truth from you—not one hour. Victor knew that.”

“My child, how can I believe it all, and that I am really here in the old home? Victor, dear fellow, can you forgive me? and can you——”

“Finish the manuscript? Uncle Victor, that is now my only ungratified ambition. To finish it—as I said in my letter—in my own house, but writing under your supervision, exactly as I used to do.”

“I did not mean that,” the baronet says, a laugh in his own eyes now, though his voice falters still in its excessive gladness; “I was thinking of something else.”

But he does not explain what, for he remembers that **they** neither of them know anything about his determination to alter his will, and leave his wealth to **Clare's husband,** instead of to Victor **Luhorne.**

STOP THIEF!

WHEN we met Sir Simeon Sportley at Marymere station, and Alec told him he had bought the living of St. Mary on the Mere, and was come down to inspect it, the baronet gave him a slap upon the shoulder, which made me rather ashamed of my brother's burly friend, and said—

"Famous, Jepherson! Now we St. Maryites shall get on a bit. We've lately undergone a pastor, my dear boy, whose starched shirt-collar was the limpest thing about him, so you may judge of his joints and his rhetoric. And we are getting as stiff-necked a generation as could possibly be avoided. But what are you going to do while the Rectory is all turned out of its own windows by the bricklayers? Where are you going to take your sister, until it is habitable?"

I think Sir Simeon had been on the point of giving me a slap upon the shoulder too, as he mentioned me.

"We are now going to seek lodgings," said Alec. "I must have some place to put my nose into, until the Rectory is pronounced waterproof; and as my sister persists in being attached to me, she must have somewhere to put hers in too. We have come to-day to see about lodgings."

"Lodgings!—lodgings in Marymere! Rubbish. Why you wouldn't live over the first day. The rooms are, on an average, half an inch square. How do you like the notion of that, Miss Jepherson?"

I told Sir Simeon I feared that Alec's nose alone, if he *did* put it in, as he desired, would occupy that space.

"Of course," he answered, with a renewed inclination to enforce his words; "besides which ladies require unlimited space now-a-days. You would have to take an extra room downstairs for the train of your dress, my dear young lady, if you went into Marymere lodgings. No, Jepherson, it is a thing unsuitable. You mustn't lose time in coming either; rare shooting I have over the Manor, and you are the very one I want to make up a party. Four guns all day, and a hand at whist after dinner, is the thing; and I have only Bowles and Haycock with me now. The fact

is, I have arranged everything, during these few seconds. An old place of mine, a couple of miles from the village (just distance enough to give proper exercise to a long-legged fellow like yourself), is empty now, and furnished, as it luckily happens, for I prepared it all for my own sister, who is coming to take it some day. You are welcome to it, my dear boy, until the orthodox habitation is ready. Come, what do you say?"

What could Alec say but thank him?

"And what does Miss Jepherson say?"

And what could Miss Jepherson say but that the offer was a very generous one?

"Very well, then," said the Squire, with a grip of Alec's hand; "take my dogcart on. It was only going home empty. Here, Jenks, get down, you sleepy dog. Drive this lady and gentleman to Redheath; get the woman roused and show the place; then drive them back here to meet whatever train they choose. Good-day, Jepherson; I'm off to town for a few hours. Ride over to see me the first day you are settled at Redheath, and then I'll come and pay my respects. Good morning, Miss Mary; you will find all the space you need at Redheath, and plenty of spare rooms to stow away the aching hearts that follow you."

Laughing at his own speech, he rushed towards the train; and Alec and I were driven off to Redheath, which we looked over, certainly, but only as a matter of form.

Alec pronounced it "jolly commodious and ghostlike" (I grieve to say Alec is not very clerical in his language); and when I thought it very lonely, he ridiculed the idea. Not a bit he said, there were rabbits about in abundance;—which, of course, though forming a kind of population, was not exactly the society I had anticipated.

The young woman who showed us over the house—a sensible, brisk, good-looking girl, called Rebecca—laughed lightly when I asked her if it were not very solitary there, saying she had only been a few days here alone, and that she always had a man to sleep in the harness-room—over there. She pointed as she spoke, standing at the front door, down through the arches of an old green verandah which ran along one side of the house, and we saw the stable premises at the end, as if we looked at them through a telescope.

"What sort of a fellow was he?" Alec asked, with an eye to taking him with the house.

"A quiet respectable man," Rebecca said; "a bit too slow perhaps, but honest enough. If the gentleman would walk down the kitchen-garden, he would find Dan digging there now."

That night, when Alec and I turned to warm our toes, after our last dinner in our city rooms, we felt most thoroughly and

entirely satisfied with our day's work. We had a handsome house ready to go into, and where for a time we might live, with no rent becoming due, and, better still, no taxes called for. I had engaged to keep on the maid, and Alec the man, so there was no trouble awaiting us on the score of servants. We should be on the spot—at least on the outskirts of the spot—to overlook the work at the Rectory ; and among our parishioners and new friends we could class the genial, wealthy, warmhearted squire of the neighbourhood.

"Nothing could have turned out better, Alec," said I, crossing my slippers complacently on the fender.

"Nothing. I shall drop in for a few days' shooting," said Alec, pouring himself a third glass of port, and forgetting to offer me a second.

"I don't think Rectors ought to shoot," I began, with suitable gravity.

"Don't you, old lady ?"—I am only twenty-one, and anybody would think I was fifty, to hear Alec talk, when he gives way to his objectionable levity. "Don't you? Now I do. I find the sermons of country parsons who mollify their two volumes of graver thoughts with their one of recreations, are always most to the point in the end."

I did not stop to ask what point, because Alec seemed so self-satisfied, and took my concurrence so thoroughly for granted ; and I did not say more then, for I recollected that Alec's sermons are much longer when he takes no holiday in the week ; and much as I esteem him, I cannot bring myself to look upon that as a recommendation. There is but little in them, and we do not want that little long.

We had been three days at Redheath. The first we had spent in congratulating ourselves on our spacious, gratuitous quarters. The second in cultivating our parishioners, and catching two colds in the damp church ; with the old clerk, whose cold was chronic now. The third I am now spending alone, for Alec walked over to see the Squire early in the day, and sent me a message back to the effect that he was going to take a day's shooting, dine at the hall, and take the dummy's place in a rubber at night.

I must say I am disappointed, for the house is new and strange to me, and Rebecca's perfect indifference rather awe-inspiring. I detain her on every conceivable pretence when she brings me my tea ; but every conceivable pretence is soon exhausted, and I am obliged to go on with my meal in silence, and let her take her honest, cheerful face away. I never knew that I was either timid or nervous before to-night, perhaps because Alec had never given me the opportunity of finding it out. He was generally somewhere about ; and for Alec to be somewhere about, meant that there was ringing, or whistling, or shouting to be heard all

over the house ; or, instead of these, that there was a big, curly head nodding opposite me in an easy-chair, wakened, perhaps, at last by a nod so peculiarly energetic, as to threaten dislocation of the reverend neck to which it was attached. Besides, when he had been away without me in those city lodgings of ours, the house had so many other people in it, that it never had this odd, quivering kind of silence which was showing me to myself in a new character to-night.

"I think, Barbara," I say, with intense nonchalance, lolling in my big chair, and trying to fill it to advantage, "you had better sit up until the master comes. He has no latch-key, so one of us must sit up, and I think perhaps we may as well both do so."

The cause of which magnanimous decision is the consciousness that I shall be more frightened in my own room than down here ; so—as I must needs be the one to sit up—I prefer the one being two. Rebecca's work down-stairs seems to me to be very silent work. I cannot hear a sound, as I try to assure myself of her distant society ; and in despair I settle myself to a long seam, always a good resource for an emergency.

And I work hard at it too, trying to feel it incumbent on myself to finish it at once. I sing to the work at first ; then say old rhymes to the rhythm of the stitches ; then fall so low as to count the number of times I draw out my needle. Still, over and above it all, I feel the silence ; and, while I hate it, my chief dread is lest it shall be broken.

Dan is to sit up in the saddle-room for his master ; he is a strong, heavy fellow, even if he is "slow," as Rebecca calls him. Surely protection enough for us. But the saddle-room is quite at the other side, as well as the other end, of the house.

Perhaps Rebecca has bolted herself into the kitchen, and is reposing at this moment fast asleep over the fire. What sort of a protection is that ?

It is getting very late now.

How unkind it is of Alec to go out in this way for his own pleasure, and leave me in a new, strange, desolate house, where a murder may quite be committed, quietly and comfortably, and no one, out in the civilised world, be able to hear a shriek. I should never have done it ; never have left Alec so. Perhaps he might not have minded so very much if I had, but any way it is a comfort to know that I never should have been so unfeeling. Indeed I don't see what a Rector wants playing whist, or shooting innocent little hares. If Alec brings one, I shall certainly have it roasted ; Alec is so selfish about always wanting to have our hares jugged. I will have my way this time. Eleven o'clock ! Oh ! it really, really is too bad. It will be midnight in another hour ; just the ghostly time. I wonder why. Have the spirits clocks and watches among them-

selves, that they can keep their appointments, and be so punctual in their getting up? Or is there some electricity in the air just at that hour?

Surely Alec will be back before that hoarse old turret-clock strikes twelve.

How easy it was yesterday to doze in this chair of mine! Why, I actually could not keep my eyes open, and certainly not my mind, while Alec read the Premier's speech about the general uselessness and evil influence of the Irish Church, and the folly of our wrongheaded notion of upholding it. I remember how the sentences grew confused, mingled, soothing, unintelligible; and then I can just remember how I sewed my seam—as the immortal buttons were done—in a dream.

Yet to-night, the more I try to sleep, just the more I cannot; the more comfortably I place my head, just the more wide awake and keen are all my senses.

Ha!

I am standing on the rug now, my head raised, my hands tightly embracing each other, and my eyes trying to help my ears to listen, for I hear a step outside the window.

Yes. There is no mistaking it. It is a step, and an alarming step. Not an honest, free, unembarrassed, at-home sort of tread, that might be Alec's; but a sneaking, superstitious, slow, stealthy step. Oh! a step before which I cannot put too many adjectives of a mean and sneaking nature—a step which sends me creeping from the room to the kitchen-stairs, without an atom of colour in my face.

"Rebecca!" I whisper, bending to speak down the dark staircase as if it were a speaking trumpet, "Rebecca!"

But as my voice sounds only like a muffled call in a nightmare, I am not surprised that she does not answer. I run down the stairs, and open the door like an embodied hurricane.

"Rebecca, Rebecca! wake up!"

"I am awake, 'em," says Rebecca, rising cheerfully. "Is any thing the matter?"

Now I draw my breath freely. Standing before the blazing fire, and looking down on Rebecca's placid face, I draw my breath as usual. Afterwards, when I have drawn it freely several times without speaking, I burst into a laugh.

I will not tell Rebecca about the footstep. No, I think not. It may have been an odd reverberation, or echo, or—something.

"Rebecca," I say, warming my hands complacently, "you look very much alone here. Suppose you come and sit with me."

"I don't mind it at all, 'em," she says, provokingly, "the house is all safely locked up."

"Oh, you had better come," I insist, airily.

And Rebecca follows me.

We turn up the lamp, stir the fire, and sit down, one on each side of the hearth, as snugly as possible.

But now I don't quite know what next to do with Rebecca. I feel a delicacy in consulting with her on the probable downfall of the Irish Church, because there is an Irish cast in her features. Alec's "Josephus" is open to my hand, but it is doubtful whether she has ever read it; and—if she has, I haven't.

"Rebecca," I say at last, with a sigh of anticipation, "did you ever have a fright?"

"A fright, 'em?" she says, with a little extra gravity; "indeed I have, and in this very house, too."

"Tell me about it, please, Rebecca," I say, settling myself back in my chair, and crossing my feet on a footstool; while all the time my ears are open to any sound that may come from without.

"Suppose it frightens you, Miss," says Rebecca, with a rather serious smile.

"You may be sure it will not frighten me so much as"—I correct my hasty words in time—"as it frightened you, Rebecca," I add, with grave superiority.

"I will tell you willingly, if you promise that, 'em; but if I frighten you, the master'll be angry."

I do not tell her he won't, for I rather like the notion of her thinking Alec so tenderly careful of me. So I merely sigh a little, then turn the sigh into a smile, and say that I am not easily frightened, and, moreover, that I am ready.

"It happened two years ago," Rebecca says, "and just about this time of year, on a Saturday night; when there was a thick darkness all round us, too thick for us even to fancy a ghost in it. We were not a large household then, though a larger one than we are to-night. The master, who was quite content with his pipe and his own fireside on other days, always rode into town on the market-days, stopped to the hotel dinner, and came back late; always requiring the mistress to sit up for him, but ordering the men and maids to bed, and stabling his own horse. There was only one daughter—Miss Emily, a young lady of your own age, I should say, and she generally sat up with the mistress. We hadn't used to like to go to bed and leave them here, but they always said the master would be very angry if he found us up, and so we had to go.

"This night I am telling you of, the mistress wasn't very well, and we tried to persuade her to go to bed and leave Miss Emily and me up together; but she wouldn't hear of it. She wouldn't break through her old rule, she said, as long as she was not obliged to; and the master should never have the disappointment of not finding her there. Ah! poor lady, she little thought how soon he was to have it.

"I must tell you the first part of the story as Miss Emily told

it to me, because I didn't see it. I have heard it so often, though, that it is as clear in my mind as the part I saw myself.

"When the mistress and Miss Emily were alone, they felt just as comfortable and cheerful as they had always done, and went on chatting together; while Miss Emily knitted, and the mistress rested, because her head was aching. It was just about the master's time for returning, and the mistress was growing a little sleepy, when suddenly they heard a slow, creeping kind of step outside. What's the matter, 'em? Do you hear something?"

"Nothing, Rebecca," I reply, with a spasmodic laugh—but I am thinking of the footstep I had heard, and am growing a little uncomfortable.

"When Miss Emily heard it, she threw down her work and listened, and the mistress roused herself wide awake at once, and forgot all about her headache. There they stood listening together for a time, in a perfect panic of fear. Then came the step again, quite distinct though it was so cunning and creeping; again, and again. At last there was a quietness, and Miss Emily, all trembling, tried to laugh, and pretend they had been fancying the sound.

"The mistress, far the most frightened of the two, suggested reading prayers, which had not been done as usual because of her headache. The big Bible was opened, and Miss Emily (the only congregation) took her seat, trying to do nothing but listen to the chapter, which the mistress read very distinctly and very loudly, partly that it might drown any outside sound, and partly, Miss Emily fancied, to make it more impressive and encouraging, and, in a measure, making up for having neglected it before.

"They got through the chapter undisturbed, then knelt down; but when they came to the Lord's Prayer, every sentence the mistress uttered was repeated outside the window, in a man's gruff, sneering voice. Miss Emily told me that she could not follow the words at all—that she could only listen while her mother slowly went through the whole prayer, the odd, disguised voice repeating every petition.

"The mistress, as her courage failed, got slower and quieter, the voice outside mimicking her exactly, only with a sneer in it; and when the prayer was ended, there was a long, smothered laugh.

"The poor mistress rose from her knees, with a face that would have done for a ghost itself; and Miss Emily ran to her, thinking she was going to faint. But she wasn't; she only sat down again before her Bible, and read straight on, without stopping or looking up.

"Miss Emily was just going to wake the servants, when they heard the tread of the master's horse, and presently afterwards

his own knock at the door. He always came to the side-door at night—quite at the opposite end of the house, you see, to where the footsteps had been—and Miss Emily darted forward to open it for him. The mistress followed her closely, afraid of being left alone in this room.

“Is it you, papa?” Miss Emily called through the bolted door; and the answer was a cheery little tap on the panel with his riding-whip—another habit of the master’s.

“With a little cry of relief from Miss Emily, and a sigh from the mistress, the door was undone; when in walked three great tall men, with black masks on their faces!

“In the first surprise and fear, Miss Emily clasped her hands and gave a scream; but, almost before it was uttered, the foremost robber, a great, strong, powerful fellow who carried the master’s whip, seized her two wrists in one hand, and with the other gagged her mouth.

“There was a laugh, which she recognised as the one she had heard at the window, and in another moment another man passed her, carrying the mistress (who was very small and timid) in his arms down the passage. Miss Emily followed, with the robber’s great red cotton handkerchief tied tightly over her mouth, and his hands gripping hers. For weeks the marks were plain on her hands and arms; but she never told me how he hurt her, for I believe she could not feel the pain, in her intense fear. The men brought them into the lighted room—this room—and put them into two chairs. Then they took some thin rope from the pockets of the third man—who didn’t seem to do anything of his own accord—and tied them to the chairs by their shoulders and ankles. Then they tied their hands together, and tightened the handkerchiefs on their mouths, stepping back to admire their own work, and laugh at the helpless figures they were looking at.

“Miss Emily said her eyes seemed to burn their lids, as she tried to look back fearlessly into their brutal, half-covered faces.

“One man, rubbing his hands and bowing mockingly to the mistress, shook a bunch of keys in her face, as a hint for her to tell him where hers were hidden. Of course she didn’t answer; but he threatened her so savagely, that she nodded towards the drawer where she kept her key-basket. He took it from its hiding-place, chuckled over the collection, and then the three men whispered together. Presently two of them took up the chair Miss Emily was on, and carried it along the passage, the third leading the way with a light. They went on, finding their way cleverly, to the bottom of the cellar stairs, where the doors were all locked. Here there was a great trying of the keys, while Miss Emily sat in the damp passage, as helpless, she said, as one of the empty barrel; but wondering wildly whether the

mistress could not have escaped while the three men were here with her.

"They examined all the cellars, then put Miss Emily's chair into the great mildewy one next to the beer-cellar, all among heaps of sticks and turf, the laughing man laughing at the figure of her sitting there, while the other two went away, returning presently with the mistress's chair, which they set opposite Miss Emily's, shutting the door upon them then, and leaving them in the mouldy darkness. It wouldn't have been quite so horrible, Miss Emily said, if they could have spoken to each other; but to sit there, near together, against their will, in their own damp cellar, knowing everything they possessed was at the mercy of those villains above them; that they could not stop them nor raise an alarm; could not even encourage each other, or even speak to each other of their fears, was dreadful.

"It was not very long afterwards that the door opened again, and one of the men's faces peered round in the light of a lantern, while the others passed in with the master between them, tied on another chair; his pipe stuck unlighted in his mouth, and then his mouth gagged afterwards, tighter even than the ladies', in spite of the cold pipe. They put him down near his wife, and and oncemore went away.

"Miss Emily heard them in the other cellars; laughing a good deal, but never talking; drawing beer and uncorking wine bottles; then evidently carrying a supply of bottles upstairs with them.

"And now I can tell you the part I saw myself. Emma, the housemaid, slept in my room then, and the cook in the little room opposite. Emma was always very ready to go to sleep, and that night she had been fast asleep a good while, when, just as I was dropping off myself, odd sounds below roused me again. I had heard the master's horse some little time before, but he always came in so quietly, that this great unusual noise rather frightened me. I woke Emma, but she was so cross that I let her doze off again, without telling her anything except that she was no sort of use in the house. Then I got up, and slipping a shawl over my nightgown, I opened my door cautiously. The sounds were unexplainable, and I went and tried to wake cook for company. But she wouldn't wake, though I shook her well. She only grumbled in her sleep, so I gave her a last shake in my anger, and went away, creeping downstairs cautiously on my bare feet, and poking my head as far as I could over the banisters as I went, to see before me.

"I opened the master's door noiselessly. Empty! Miss Emily's. Empty too! They could not have come to bed, at any rate, and I went on.

"I had nearly reached the bottom of the stairs—the noise and

laughter getting louder and louder as I came on—when I saw a light coming from the open door of this room. I came one step lower, and stood listening, with my breath still. One more, and I stopped again. One more, and I was standing in the hall, feeling as if to move from the mat then, to go either way, would be instant detection. Did you ever notice how the boards in the floor will creak, when you are trying to step silently and secretly, though they never dream of making a sound at other times? Oh, how the stairs did creak and crack under me that night! though I never heard them—at least never noticed them—do it either before or since.

“But I had reached the bottom now, and I crept towards the partly-open door, and peeped in.

“What’s the matter, ‘em?”

“A step, Rebecca! Didn’t you hear a step outside?”

“You are thinking of my story, ‘em,” says Rebecca, with a reassuring smile of incredulity, “and you fancy things.”

“Go on,” says I, a little hurt and a little relieved.

“There were three men at the table, all the top part of their faces covered with black gauze, eating hard and fast, but drinking a good deal harder and faster. Everything eatable that the larder had held seemed to have been brought out there, and more bottles than the table had ever held before, I should think. There were no plates and glasses, and the men were helping themselves from the dishes and bottles, signing to each other for things as they wanted them, and laughing a good deal, but never speaking. I could notice, in all my panic, that they never uttered a word aloud.

“At the end of the table one of the men, with a pipe in his mouth, was packing an old carpet-bag with the plate he took from the plate-basket, and a good many of the ladies’ ornaments which had been in their bed-rooms. The other men were pushing the wine bottles into their coat pockets. As I stood at the door—where there was a bit of shadow—this was what I saw in the lighted room. It did not take so long to look at it, as it has done to tell it. The instant I had taken it all into my mind I turned away, with a step more cautious than before; and as I did so, my eye rested for a moment on the little table at the back of the hall, where the dinner-bell always stood; and an idea struck me instantly. In my night-dress, as I was, I crept on past the open door (my bare feet seeming to make as much noise as patters could have done on another day), and looked down longingly on the big bell. But to have reached it was nothing to have done—the difficulty would be to take it up. If I let the clapper touch the side of the bell, the help I meant to give would of course be ruin. I must seize the clapper; yet if I tilted the bell, to put my left hand under, I might—and most probably

should—touch it against the bell, and so be discovered in a moment.

“I took off the shawl I had put round my shoulders, and wrapped it tightly round the bell; then I had but one chance, and that I must take carefully and fearlessly.

“I could not, dare not, pause to think, when once my mind was made up to do it; for the very slightest trembling in my hand would destroy this one last chance of mine.

“I took the handle of the bell in my right hand, holding the shawl with it, and lifted it slowly—slowly—in a perfectly straight line. A little shake or quiver in my hand, a little turn to the right or left, and those three men, who sat within a dozen yards of me, would be out. But my hand was steady, and the heavy bell came up, straight and sure, until it was six inches from the table. Then my left hand grasped the clapper, and I fled with the bell, past the open door again, and up the stairs; a sudden, horrible terror upon me now.

“It took me less time to rush up-stairs than it had taken me to make a single one of my downward steps, just before; yet I had hardly reached the lobby when I felt, rather than heard, that the men had come out of the room, and were looking after me. My feet seemed to grow to the ground—as they do in dreams sometimes—yet I was crossing the lobby with quick, stealthy steps, fully alive and awake to the sound of the heavy following foot-step on the stairs behind me.

“The big spare room had windows to the front; it was locked, I knew, but the key was outside. My fingers closed upon it, and I felt as if I should never be able to take them off, while the smothered breath behind grew louder, and the hurrying feet came nearer me, while I had still to let the key go, and turn the handle; and this one hand that I had at liberty seemed to cling to everything, and take twice as long as it need have done.

“I was in the room at last, and pushed to the door behind me; then, crossing the room at a bound, I flung up the window, and while I heard the key turned sharply in the lock behind me, I leaned through as far as I could, and rang the bell with all my might and strength. The bell rang out in the quiet darkness, and the more I tried to make it sound a thrilling alarm, the more it seemed to sound a cheerful summons to dinner.

“I had not time to think how helpless I was, locked into that empty room; nor how mad it was of me to choose one where the key was on the outside. I had only one idea in my head—that was, that I must ring until help came; and so I rang more and more frantically, feeling that when the robbers found I had the bell with me, they would return and seize me; for of course when they locked me in they had not guessed what I carried.

“It must have been very cold, standing there half through

the window, with only one thin garment on, but I never thought of it at the time; and certainly I took arm' exercise enough to keep any one warm.

"As I rang on—determined that if the sound was not very alarming in its quality, it should be in its quantity—my teeth set together, and my arms aching woefully, the light of a lantern was turned on me from below, showing me a man's masked face. The lips had a broad grin on them; and, when he saw that I could see him, he raised his hat, and bowed mockingly.

"I rang, and rang, growing every moment more despairing; until at last voices answered from one or two directions, and then my door was opened.

"It was actual sunlight before we found the master and mistress and Miss Emily; and, oh! they did look ghostly objects sitting there in the sickly light; all speechless, and stiff in their seats like—really, something like the Guys the boys bring round here on the fifth of November.

"I don't think quite so many things had been packed and taken as would have been, if the robbers had not heard the dinner-bell; but the house was certainly cleared of its most valuable property, and we should never have been able to trace the thieves, if they had got off that night; for how could we have sworn to men whose faces we had never seen, and whose voices we had never heard? But, fortunately for us, one of them was cleverly caught by two of our own men, and he gave up the names of the others. So the property was restored; but the mistress never recovered the fright and the damp cellar, and died very soon after that night. Dear me! Miss Jepherson, it *is* a step! I hear it myself now."

As Rebecca speaks, she walks to the shuttered window, listening, with her head on one side.

"I heard it three times during your story, Rebecca," I say, too really frightened now to try to hide the terror in my voice. "Oh, let us ring the dinner-bell!"

"Had we better, I wonder?" muses Rebecca. "Have you really heard it three times, Miss?"

"Really, really! Oh, it will be so terrible to be tied in the cellar all night! 'There—listen!"

Rebecca's cheerful face blanches as the step—the creeping, stealthy step—draws up to the window and hesitates; and I seize her arm.

"Come now, Rebecca, before they break in! We shall get help in time, perhaps. Oh, how cruel it is of Alec to leave us here to be robbed and murdered!"

"Come then, Miss," whispers Rebecca, protectingly, "we will lock *ourselves* in this time, and ring till somebody hears us, if not the master. It shall wake even Dan."

I take the bell myself, and, locking the spare room door behind us, we ring lustily at the open window, while the January wind shrieks in, seeming to cut my face, as it passes, like a razor—not that I ever had my face cut with a razor yet, but I have seen Alec's suffering, and can judge of the sensation.

We pierce the darkness outside, but see no glimmer of a lantern; and when we have rung long enough to rouse the whole neighbourhood, there's Rebecca coolly proposing that we shall go and see whether all the doors are safely locked and bolted! The very idea of it terrifies me, until she reminds me that, on that other night, the ladies themselves had let the robbers in, and that we never need do that.

I follow Rebecca—I must own that I neither pass nor overtake her; I am quite satisfied to follow humbly, while she goes what she calls the round of the house.

"Halloa!" calls a voice outside—an angry, satisfied, suppressed, exultant voice. "Open this door!"

"Oh! Alec," I cry, trembling in every limb, as Rebecca draw back the bolts, "you are come, and we have been nearly killed!"

Perhaps the unanswerable truth of the first assertion excuses, in some degree, the vague untruthfulness of the second; but of course I consider the two facts indisputable, especially as no one stops to dispute them.

"Get in, you scoundrel!" rings Alec's angry voice, "get into the light, and let me look at you, you thief!"

"Oh! you have really caught him, then, Alec?" I say, seizing affectionately on my brave brother, while Rebecca runs for a candle, "you really caught that wicked robber, Alec? How brave of you! But—where are the others?"

"Were there others?" asks Alec, pushing away my hand in his excitement. "How did the other rascals get off? Speak up, you vagabond, for you shall give them all up to the law."

"How he gasps, Alec!" I whisper, intensely pleased, while I get a little more behind my big brother.

"Gasps!—I should think so," laughs Alec, proudly. "He feels his collar rather tight, I daresay, having been dragged along by it for half a mile. You will have a few more miles to go presently, my fine fellow—to the police station."

"Of course you heard the bell, Alec?" I inquire, feeling my own share of the honour.

"Yes; I had just come within hearing of the alarm, when I met him skulking through the plantation. So I knew in a minute he had been after no good. Now, turn your face to the light, my brave fellow, and let us have a look at you."

The man, still labouring for his breath, takes no notice, and Rebecca brings the light up to him. Then suddenly—and feeling

almost as breathless as he is himself—we all three utter the same syllable, at the same moment—

“Dan!”

But nobody thinks of anything more to add, until Alec stammers out:

“What were you doing there?”

“I thought the young missus ’ud feel frightened at being ’ere by ’erself,” says Dan, almost crying in his shortness of breath, “so I walked up and down a bit outside ’er windows, to be comp’ny, and show ’er as I was theer. But when the bell set on so, I remembered that other night, and knew as I shud be ketched and took up along o’ the thieves as ’ad frittened the missis and Becca. So I run away to meet you, sir; but you laid ’old o’ me afore I cud say it, and took all the speak out o’ me. I’m very much afeard you’ve missed the reel robbers in looken after me, sir.”

I rather avoid meeting Alec’s eye now, not being prepared to undergo any strict questioning on the subject of “real robbers”; and, to gain time, I weakly begin to turn the tables on himself.

“You shouldn’t be out so late—you know you shouldn’t, Alec,” I whimper. “You have no business to leave us women alone.”

“No business at all,” replies Alec, smiling and wiping his face in the most unfeeling manner; “only pleasure. Now, Dan, be off to bed, and don’t be so easily scared next time you mount guard. Shut up everything, Rebecca,—even the bell.”

I grow almost nervous when we are together in the light again, and think it safest to begin another reproach.

“It is wrong—you know it is, Alec,—for you, who call yourself a clergyman, to go to bachelors’ parties, and sit up till—”

It is not worth while for me to go on, for Alec—on his back on the couch, and shaking until I’m sure the springs are breaking—rolls my best antimacassar up into a ball, and aims it deliberately at my chignon.

I have quite expected him to make me a promise never to dine out again without me; but he doesn’t seem to think it at all necessary, and only laughs more and more—looking the greatest goose possible, and not a bit like a Rector.

LARRY'S HUT.

Our cottage stands a quarter of a mile from the village, separated from the highway only by the trim little lawn, in which my mother and Nellie and I cultivate our favourite plants and shrubs. But I could see neither plant nor shrub, as I stood at the hall-door on this Sunday I am going to tell of, for the heavy darkness of the November evening had engulfed them all. I watched the last glimmer of the lantern which the maid carried, as she walked with my mother and Nellie to church; then I drew back into the hall with a shiver of relief, and locked and bolted the door. The drawing-room was warm, and bright, and snug; but my first act was to poke the fire into a still more cheerful blaze. Then I sat idly before it for a time. I pictured my mother alone in our seat in church; and Nellie at the harmonium, taking my place because I was not well enough to go out to-night. Then I wondered whether Mr. Carr, our young unmarried Rector, would walk home with them after service, as he was very fond of doing when Nellie was there. Whether Mr. Carr came or not, I had no fear for them through that walk from the village; I should have laughed if any one had suggested such a thing to me. We knew every villager well; we even knew by sight the men who were felling the trees on the heath, for in our long Winter walks we often passed them, either at their work, or resting, with their pipes, in the shelter of Larry's hut—a wretched little shed enough, to be the only shelter they could get on the bleak upland.

It was not very likely I should begin to fear for my mother and Nellie, when this was the seventh Winter we had spent in this village, in perfect safety and peace. Peace! Was it really peace, for all of us? The word—so wide and calm and wonderful in its meaning—was hardly yet my own to grasp and keep. There were times when I felt that it would come, and that my life need not be a listless or an idle one; but there were other times when I fancied it was no nearer to me than it had been on that day, a year ago, when the news had come to me—to me, first of all, as I stood at the garden gate in the sunshine!—that Donald had been drowned on his way home to me. Ah,

me! where had the sunshine gone, when I crept back to the house, wrapped in the chill grey mist? And, at such times, the fingers of my right hand would close upon his diamonds, and my heart burn and quiver, in the cruel grasp of its overmastering sorrow. It would have been so much easier, I thought, to be patient and content, if I could have had Donald's last glance and last words to remember. If I had been able to recall those, instead of that horrible solitude of the storm-driven sea, and the utter loneliness of Donald's death.

I rose from my seat before the fire. I would not let my thoughts wander in the old sad way on this Sunday night, so I went to the piano to sing; drifting at last, as I generally did, into the hymn which pleads for those in peril on the sea. Then the tears, that come so often to my eyes now, welled up and fell upon my fingers; on Donald's ring; on the diamonds I love so dearly, because they seem to tell me always of the wealth and richness of his love, and of the brightness and purity of the Home in which I tried to follow him now, with my longing thoughts. The notes swam before my eyes, so I bent my head upon the music-desk, and let the tears have their own way. The room was lushed and still, the whole house was wrapped in silence, when I heard a knocking at the front door; not loud, but long and hurried. A quivering pain ran through me for an instant, less like fear than a foreboding, and, with my heart beating heavily, I sat motionless while the sound died away. If it should be repeated, I must go. The silence had hardly settled, when it was broken once more; this time the summons was even quicker and more hurried than before, and I did not hesitate another moment.

"What is it?" I inquired, nervously, before I opened the door, but with my fingers ready on the latch.

"Quick! open the door," said a man's voice, low and anxious.

"Why?" I asked, a hundred fears assailing me at once.

"Don't stop to question"—The hurried words were uttered in a whisper.—"Your mother has been taken ill in church, and they are carrying her home. Open the door and show a light. They will be at the gate in a moment."

Not an instant longer did my fingers hesitate on lock or bolt. I threw the door open wide, and turned hastily to fetch the lamp; my knees tottering under me, and my heart beating rapidly in its fear. The man who had spoken to me through the closed door walked at once into the hall behind me; then, turning coolly round, he locked the door upon us both, and pocketed the key. In a lightning flash I understood the truth then, and for an instant cowered to the wall in a helpless panic of alarm. He came up to me, a painted mask covering his face, except where the eyes shone through the paper sockets.

"All right now," he said, calmly, "don't bother about moving the lamp. I want its light in there for a bit. Come along."

But at the rude grip of the man's fingers on my left hand, my trembling helplessness fled, and I started from him with all my strength.

"I won't keep you long," he said, as he followed me into the lighted room, speaking in a rough, determined tone which he was evidently trying to disguise. "At least it'll be your own fault if I do. Pass me over that ring. That's all I want, so the quicker you are about it the better."

The immovable, painted face was close to mine, and the savage, hungry eyes were fixed upon me behind their lifeless sockets. I felt—as my own eyes fastened themselves upon the repulsive face—that soon my senses must leave me, and I fought with this feeling as an animal fights with death.

"Never mind staring!" exclaimed the man, roughly seizing my wrist once more. "You'll never make much out of my face; don't try. Hand me over the diamonds, and let me be off. I'd rather *you* did it, than trouble me to help myself; not that I'll make much of a trouble of it, either. I'll give you two minutes from now, not a second longer. Set about it at once."

At first no words would come to my lips when I wanted them; but before the two minutes were over—so utterly weak was I, and so isolated from all help—I had begun to plead with this robber, begging him to take other things, and leave me my betrothal ring. I really think I told him—in my fear and my distress—how the ring had been put upon my finger; how I had promised never to remove it; and how I never could, through all my life, because Donald was dead. The words came tottering from my lips, until they ended almost in prayer.

"Take my watch, or what you will, only leave me this."

"I don't want the watch," he answered, carelessly. "It might be a trouble to me, and I'd rather be without it. But the ring I've set my mind on. I've had my eyes upon it once or twice, when you played at church, and the lights fell on it. I've been watching for you to stay at home alone at night, and now I'm not going to be balked, I can tell you. Now then, the two minutes are gone, and so is my patience."

"I shall never take this ring off," I faltered, locking my fingers tightly together, "*never*. I promised I never would. Do you expect," I cried, with a sudden change of tone in my despair, "to commit such a robbery as this and go free? In spite of your masked face, I could swear to you, by your voice, before any judge in England."

"I daresay," put in the man, with a short laugh, "when you happen to hear it before a judge. Wait till then. But my time's

valuable just now. I'll take the ring myself, as you're so gingerly about breaking a promise."

I kept my hands from the man as long as I had any strength in them, but I was small and weak and he was big and strong, so that it was but a slight delay, after all.

"Silly to waste the little strength you have," he muttered contentedly, when he felt both my hands entirely captive in his powerful grasp. "What purpose has it served? See, it doesn't take me long to draw the ring off. I've known a tighter fit. Ah! ah! these stones are worth looking at—they do my eyes good. Cost a fortune once, I'll be bound, though it's a good while ago. They've been in somebody's family a many years, I guess, so it's about time they were in somebody else's. There, you haven't broke your promise, after all. Now I'll let myself out, and you take my advice, bolt the door safely behind me, and don't open it again so innocent, when you're alone in the house."

I stood quite still until the man had left; then—because he called to me that he should wait outside until I had locked myself in—I moved slowly to the door, and turned the key. As I did so, a sudden idea, strong as a resolution, came into my mind. I listened until I could hear no longer the sound of the heavy footsteps crushing the gravel; waited a few minutes longer to allow them to pass the gate; then, wrapping my black waterproof about me, I noiselessly opened the door and stepped out, closing it as noiselessly behind me.

The darkness gave me fresh courage; presently, I knew, my eyes would grow accustomed to it; and out in the road I should surely be able to see the figure in advance. I crept cautiously down the garden path, closed the gate behind me without the echo of a sound, and I was out in the turnpike road. No need to pause in doubt which way to turn. I felt very sure that the man would not walk towards the village with that ring about him, when he knew my alarm would be raised after service. No, he would take the opposite way, of course; and presently, perhaps, I should be able to distinguish him before me. I did not fear being seen myself; my black dress and cloak made me like a part of the universal darkness which surrounded me. But still I took the precaution of keeping close to the hedge-bank, while I pierced the gloom before me with my eager, searching eyes. I have a keen, far sight, and presently I was able to distinguish a form moving on in front, which I knew must be the man who had stolen Donald's ring from me. Ah! what a desperate courage the consciousness of that loss seemed to have given me! All my love and sorrow and despair rose in a kind of wild, impetuous bravery, shutting out just then all room for fear. One idea alone possessed me. Could I let this thief take from my sight the ring with which Donald had made me his betrothed—as

sacred to me since his death, as if it had made me his wife? Could I bear to lose for ever this precious pledge of his rich love and trust, as I had lost *him* a year ago? A cry hovered on my lips, again and again, as I thought of this, but it was not a cry of fear. On and on, I went, walking noiselessly upon the grass beneath the hedge; only dimly seeing the line of road before me, only but very faintly descrying the dark figure on the grey line. Suddenly I missed it, and I started and stopped in bewilderment. How could it be? Had he crossed a hedge which I could never climb, and left me here, even more helpless than I should have been if I had stayed at home? But I dared not waste a moment standing idle. I started again, still creeping cautiously on beneath the hedge, and trying hard to recall the bearings of this part of the road. By the help of the outline of a thick group of trees before me, I could tell that I was now not many yards from a narrow, tree-shadowed lane, which had an ugly name in the neighbourhood, on account of a murder having been committed there, one Winter night, upon a defenceless traveller, who had ventured to shorten his way to the town by taking the near cut across the heath. Many times Nellie and I had walked up here on sunny Summer days, but we had always tacitly avoided it, either in gloom or solitude. I hesitated at the turning, shrinking involuntarily from entering the dense darkness of the lane; but I knew it was my only chance of keeping the man in sight at all, for the lane opened soon again into a field which bordered the heath; and there I should be able to see him, if—as I felt sure—he had turned here.

Looking back now upon that night, I do not remember that I was pursuing any definite plan, or indulging any definite hope. I think I only felt that to let this masked man escape me was to lose Donald's ring for ever. Except in one or two horrible moments, I hardly realized the danger of what I was doing—I, a girl, alone in the darkness; no help within call, now that the high-road was left. The one great and intense longing to recover Donald's ring swallowed up all other thoughts; and now and then there flashed across me the conviction that the darkness was my safeguard.

In this steep, dark lane, I had no need to shrink to the hedge-bank; I made my way straight on as best I could, until suddenly a crackling of twigs startled me, and I drew back, crouching against the hedge. Then memory came to my aid. The old gate which separated this lane from the field beyond was always kept fastened; and, besides that, between its upper bars thorns had been interlaced. My heart-beats ceased for a minute. The man must be climbing this gate now. The relief it gave me to find that I was so certainly upon his track was intense, but upon this came the terrible consciousness that I, too, should have to climb

this gate ; and should I ever be able to do it noiselessly ? No, I dared not trust myself. Covered by the darkness of the lane, I crept forward, and fixed my eyes upon where I knew the outline of the gate would be visible, beyond the trees which closed in this lane. Just as it shaped itself to my eyes, a man's figure alighted on the other side, and turned as if to disentangle something. A ghastly fear seized me when I found that I could see the large, masked face ; not, of course, plainly enough even to have told that it was masked, unless I had known it before, but still sufficiently to give me a new fear for my own danger of discovery in this pursuit. A thought struck me. Feeling about the skirt of my mourning dress, I tore from it a wide strip of crape, and tied that over my face. An entirely and wholly black figure now, I could venture out into the open field beyond, as soon as I could feel sure that the man I was tracking would be quite out of earshot. Then I climbed the gate, my dress every moment getting entangled in the thorns, while the darkness—intensified so much by the covering on my face—caused me to stumble at almost every step. I had passed the gate now, and was feebly and nervously running across the fields, that I might, as swiftly as possible, gain the covert of the trees upon the heath.

I had allowed sufficient time, for there was no sign before me now of the dark figure I was pursuing. Once gain the shelter of the woody ground, and I felt I should be safe from the chance of being seen ; while, if he crossed the heath on the cart-road beside the trees, I could follow him, being myself in safety. But, though I sped rapidly on into the wood—my eyes aching and burning in their strained gaze out into the wide gloom of the unsheltered heath—I could see no glimpse of the thief I had followed.

I was hesitating a minute, baffled and bewildered, when the silence which surrounded me was suddenly broken by a muttered curse. I caught at the tree near me, knowing it would be death to me to cry or fall. The man then was close beside me ; had stumbled, here quite near me, over one of the tree-stumps which had so often interrupted my own steps. I staggered as I supported myself by the tree, trembling in every limb, and scarcely daring to draw my breath, for fear of his discovering my proximity. A horrible fear overpowered me, which I had hardly had time to feel before now ; a terrible consciousness of how entirely one step might put my life in this ruffian's power. Straining every sense I possessed, in painful intentness, I heard the footsteps retreating on the rough soil towards the cart-road, and then all was silent again. A little higher up, across the road, I could distinguish now the outline of Larry's hut, and I moved on towards it ; still keeping back among the trees, and still watching

intently the strip of bare heath which lay between the wood and the hut. Exactly opposite the doorless entrance of the half-ruined shed I stopped, my ears aching and throbbing in the strain I put upon them, my eyes feeling as if the lids could never fit and cover them again.

But it was not very long before I saw a glimmer of light in the old hut. I leaned forward, my very breath muffled, as my eyes followed this speck of light which slowly moved about the shed. It showed me nothing, but it convinced me of the presence there of the man of whom I dreaded to lose sight. What was he going to do? My pulses throbbed with an acute pain as I waited to see. At last the light was still for a moment, then fell to the ground; but a candle, stuck in the wall beside the door, had first been lighted by it, and would have allowed me to distinguish other objects within the hut, if I had cared to look away from the man's figure. He was standing before the candle now, with my ring on his hand, examining the stones, moving it, that the flickering, glaring light should fall and be caught by every brilliant separately. Slowly and methodically, after his deliberate investigation, he folded a piece of paper round and round my ring, then turned, with the parcel in his hand, as if to leave the place again. His face—masked still—was raised now fully in my sight. Yes, he was coming away. Ah! could I follow him further still? My heart sank with a dead weight of utter hopelessness, but it was scarcely for more than an instant. He did not pass the doorway. Stopping just within it, he raised the hand which held the packet; and when, half a minute afterwards, he brought his hand down, the packet was not in it. Then surely, in some little crevice over the broken doorway, he had hidden the ring; to lie in secure concealment until the alarm had blown over, and it might be safe to carry the stolen diamonds away. I thought all this, and yet I felt that every power I possessed was merged in that one strained effort to *see*.

Once more the man I watched stood before the flaming candle. Drawing the mask from his face, he tore it into pieces, and burned each piece separately, watching the ashes fall upon the turfy soil. Then he blew out the light leisurely, and came from the hut. And now it was to *hear* that I strained every power I possessed. The candlelight had robbed me for awhile of my power of seeing in the gloom; but I must be assured that he was safe in the distance before I ventured forth. O, thank heaven! The footsteps died in the opposite direction from that in which we had come. Evidently the thief was going to take the short cut across the heath, to the village where I knew the men lived who were employed in felling these trees. He must be one of them, then, as I had guessed; for unless he had

known that way very well, he would not have trusted to finding it in the darkness.

Minute after minute I waited in my concealment, allowing him time to walk a quarter of a mile away before I would dare to leave the darkness of the wood, even in my black dress, and with the black covering on my face. If I could but have *heard* his steps in the distance, to have been sure that he was gone. I crept a few paces out upon the heath road, then paused, my heart thumping against my side, great beads of perspiration starting on my forehead. He might be lurking here close to the shed, keeping guard over the stolen treasure; the intense and deathlike silence seemed the very breath of treachery and hidden danger. Stooping nearer to the ground, and creeping noiselessly, I went on a few steps further. Suddenly I rose upright, with a swimming in my head and ears. I had fancied that I heard a man's breath close to my ear. Only fancy; and I crept on again.

The open doorway of the hut at last; another step, and I was within. Another step; but this step threw down an old bench which must have been propped there, and the sound went out upon the heath, with a noise awful to me as a sudden thunder-clap. Great heaven! if the robber should be prowling in the darkness near, and hearing this, should hasten in to see what it could be! If he should come and find me there, within the isolated hut, a feeble, panic-stricken woman, who had it in her power to witness against him, *if he let her leave this place alive!* I caught at the doorpost, to support myself. Every limb seemed powerless, yet still my ears were listening for a returning foot-step, with the old strained eagerness. But no sound broke the silence which followed the fall of the timber, and presently a desperate courage came to me. Still holding fast to the doorpost, I raised myself by the loose timber which lay on the ground; and, supporting myself by one hand, groped along the boards above the opening with the other—groped round them, and above them, and behind them, while the cold drops fell from my face, uplifted in the darkness.

For some time this groping was to no purpose, but at last my searching fingers found a crevice between the jamb of the door and the wall, and, moving slowly along in it, were stopped by a little roll of paper fitted tightly in one spot. This, then, was the parcel I had watched the man fold—this was Donald's ring—and I drew it from its hiding-place, with hands that shook as if they were palsied. Could it be really mine once more? Donald's ring mine again!

Now I was free to leave this desolate solitude, and to go home. Home!—what a long way off it was, and what danger might not now be lying in wait for me, outside this dreary hut! Ah! this

new, shrinking cowardice would never do. I had Donald's ring safe; the man of whom I was in terror had disappeared in another direction; I would fear nothing now. I said it again and again; yet, when I turned to leave the hut an awful and overwhelming terror seized me, lest the man whom I had myself watched had been watching me, and now was waiting for me out there in the darkness. I drew back, actually forgetting I was in the darkness there, and could not have been watched as he had been. I fancied I could hear that muttered curse repeated just outside the hut, then that a man's laugh burst out close to me, there among the loose timber; I was growing to feel that I never could venture again alone upon the heath. Should I shriek for help, putting all the strength I had into one piercing cry? or should I lie motionless where I was? Now that the long tension of excitement was over, I was as helpless and nervous as a child.

I have an idea how long I had crouched at the back of the old shed—it must have been a long time even in reality, and seemed an endless time to me—when a sudden, nervous access of fear gave me the impetus I needed. The wind, in its unfettered race across the upland, had blown the piece of paper I had taken from my ring, straight up against me, to touch my very eyes. The terror this sudden rustling and touch gave me, was childish and over in a moment, but during that moment I had started from my position, left the hut, and was speeding on my way to the covert of the trees again. Even then, even in my black dress and in the heavy darkness, I could not trust myself to take the road. Again and again I stumbled and fell; again and again it seemed as if some fiendish power held me back, and baffled me in my desperate haste. Had I ever known such darkness before this night? Had the skies ever seemed to give no glimmer of light before? Would the stile never come, that led into the field beyond the heath? Surely I must have passed it, even though I was feeling my way, as well as probing the blackness with my aching, burning eyes.

Ah! it was found at last. Across the field I went with dragging, feeble steps, and found the fastened gate out into the lane. But could I climb it, with the thorns so thickly interlaced there? I had never paused to doubt this on my way to the heath long hours ago; I would not pause to doubt it now. Even if I fell, the pain that I should suffer could not be greater than the pain that I was suffering then. What was this singing in my ears, this knocking in my head? One or two weak attempts, which failed; one last effort and I was in the narrow, tree-darkened and sin-haunted lane, which I had never dared to tread alone, even in the brightest day of Summer, and whose darkness now was like the darkness of a sealed grave. With both arms stretched out as

far as I could reach, to keep my dark way clear, I crept feebly and slowly down this lane. I have often, since then, tried to fancy the effect of meeting such a figure, enveloped from head to foot in black, and with arms spread like a phantom's.

So, I came down the lane at a creeping pace, groping my way inch by inch, and only conscious—as it seems to me now—that I was passing the spot where an awful crime had been committed—on such a night as this. Just when I could distinguish that I was near the end of this lane, and just when I saw the break in the trees where the high road crossed the opening, I caught sight of lights passing slowly before me. But after having watched one human form for so long, in terror and alarm, I shrank timidly from the chance of encountering others. They might be rough men, too ; so the utter darkness and loneliness were best. But while I hesitated, I heard my own name shouted again and again ; loudly, cheerily, anxiously, longingly.

“Olive!—Miss Lee!—Olive!”

Ah! these were friends then, seeking me, come to save me. I clasped my hands above my head, and tried to utter a moment's prayer of thankfulness. I tried to call in answer. But no sound came from my benumbed and stiffened lips. And then this utter incapacity to utter a cry began to frighten me almost more than all else. They were passing on. They would leave me there, not knowing they had been near me. Must I, even at the last minute, die alone here in the darkness? Yes, it *must* be, for my strength was spent at last.

Again I tried to call, with all the power remaining to me, but the faint tone, like a whisper, which escaped my lips, left the silence undisturbed. There was only one chance left. I gathered up my little remnant of strength, and—with the fleet, short-lived courage of despair—I ran. I think now that my running was quite as slow as walking, but I fancied then that I must be rapidly nearing those rescuers, who again pierced the night silence with their calls. Only a few steps on before me now they were, moving very slowly, and searching the wide road on either side with their lowered lanterns. I saw forms familiar to me. I saw Mr. Carr ; I saw Nellie—nearest of all to me was Nellie. *One* last effort—only one now ! I came up behind her ; I turned to look into her face—and then I fell before her on the ground.



Christmas was past, and there were snowdrops lying on my bed, when I was first able clearly to recall that Sunday night. I could lie calm and restful then, for the terrible fever which had dragged me to the gates of death, had left behind it only a **great weakness** and tiredness—no pain at all. I could bear to remember

everything, because—more real and vivid even than the terrors of that night—were the memories of beautiful dreams of Donald, which had visited me often in my pain. I remembered how, in one dream, he himself had put the stolen ring back upon my finger, whispering, as he did so, that he knew I had not broken my promise, and that he loved and trusted me for ever. Ah! how sweet to feel that, even in the glory above, he could love and trust me still!

"Awake again already?" smiled Nellie, as she came softly into my room, and sat herself beside me on the bed. I left you sleeping, and I've kept mamma away, and——"

"And what, Nellie?"

"Nothing," she answered, gently laying her warm hand on my wasted one. "Do you guess who laid the snowdrops on your bed, Olive?"

"Of course I do. Nellie, I've been wanting you to come in—only you; I want you to take off this cap, and let me look in the glass."

"What vanity!" she smiled quite merrily though I could see that her eyes saddened too.

"I know I am made to wear it to hide my hair," I went on, trying to push it back with my feeble fingers. "Nellie, I'm not afraid of seeing. I know I had a great fear on that Sunday night when—I fell ill, and I am not too childish to hear that it—turned my hair—white."

Nellie's soft, clear laugh, was good to hear, and the glass was before me in a moment.

"Why, Olive," she cried, bending impulsively to kiss me, "we never imagined you would dream of such a thing as *that*; we only wanted to hide from you, just yet, that most of your hair had been cut off in your fever. There it is, you see, as bright as ever, only exceedingly short."

That was all, and I heaved a slow sigh of relief. There are few girls of twenty who would like to wake to the discovery that their hair is white, though, like myself, they may have lost all ambition for themselves as entirely as if it had whitened so from age.

"Now we will not say one word more about that night—yet," whispered Nellie, putting aside the glass, and then returning to me with her bright eyes very full of sunshine.

"Yes; one thing more," I pleaded, laying the fingers of my right hand tenderly upon Donald's ring, "I remember it all distinctly. I remember following—this, and finding it, and saving it; but I did not put it on. I felt—I remember that I felt as if I had no right to put it on; and once I dreamed,—Nellie, who *did* put it on my finger, when I was too ill to know?"

"Who should have done it?" Nellie asked, with a wonderful

soft brilliance in her eyes. "Oh, don't ask me any questions, my dear. Wait, and ask—mother."

Ah, I had no need to ask. Looking into Nellie's face, I read it all.

"It was Donald," I said, and the whispered words came from my heart like a prayer.

Yes, it was Donald! Oh, the sudden sunshine which those few words flung richly on all the years before me. Yes, it was Donald; and presently they let him come and tell me of his rescue from the sea. And he took my poor thin hand in his, and laid his lips upon it; but would not let me speak to him, even to tell him I had never broken my promise. Somehow he seemed to know it all quite well without my words.

Two things he told me afterwards, which I was very glad to hear. One was, that no one in the village could quite understand the mysterious disappearance of one of the men who had been employed on the heath. He had been the first to reach Larry's Hut, on the Monday morning after my night walk, but had left it again before his companions came up to him, and had never been seen, or heard of, since. The other pleasant thing Donald told me was, that he did not at all object to my short hair.

THE END.

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